

BILLY'S PRINCESS



HELEN EGGLESTON HASKELL

LABORA ET ORA



RICHARD G. DICK

BILLY'S PRINCESS

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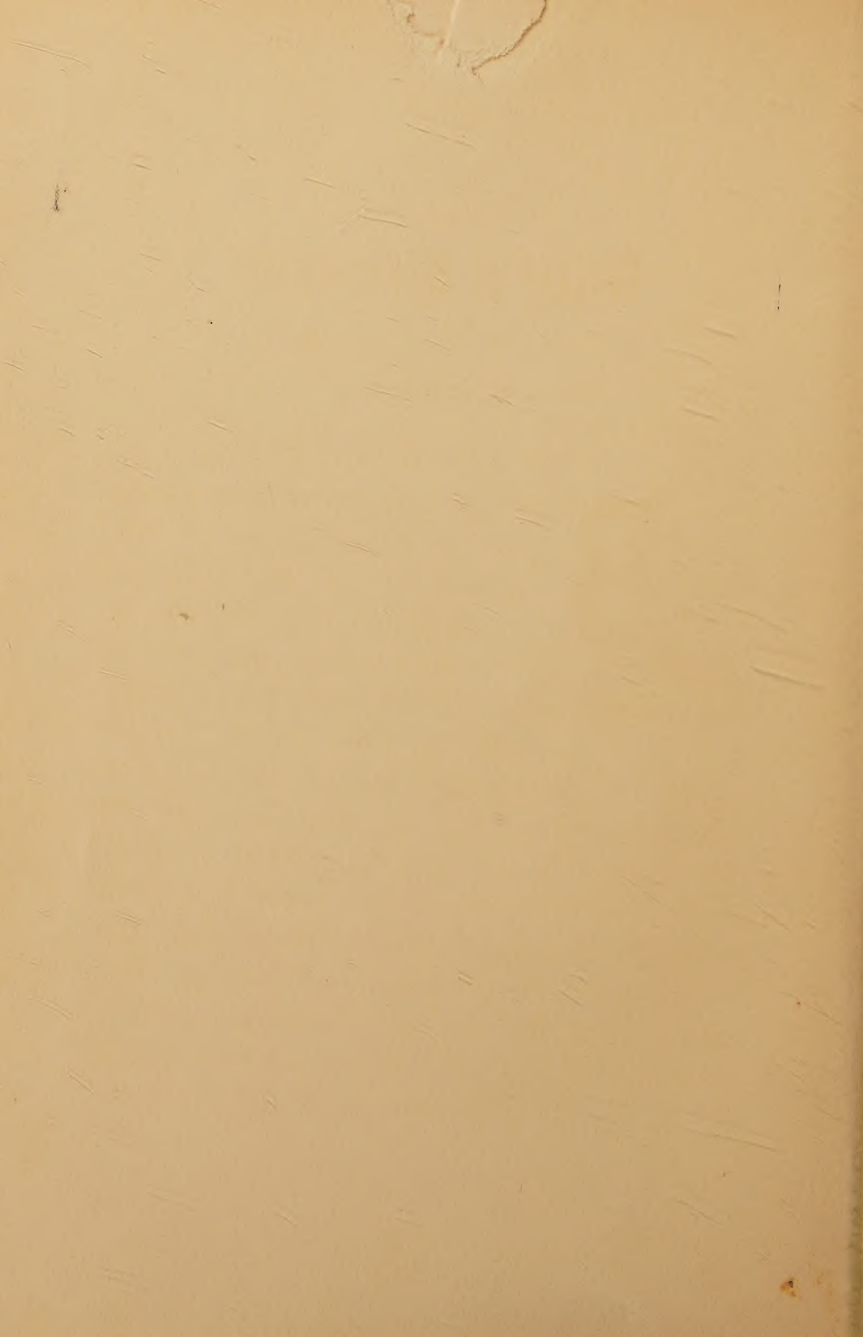
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Billy's Princess

CHAPTER I

BILLY AND HIS MOTHER



BILLY'S mother had gone to a sanitarium, and Billy felt himself to be the luckiest boy in the world — that is in his world, which consisted of the twenty or thirty boys ranging from ten to twelve years old who lived in his block. For three days he had occupied a room all by himself on the top floor of Mrs. Hawkins' boarding-house, and there had been nobody to scold when he pulled the tacks from the carpet to finish the fine shirt waist box he was making for Miss Mabie, whose cheeks were like red apples. Then, too, he was going to Maine in a very

short time to live with his great-uncle Nathan who owned two horses, a great many cows, and a farm ten times as big as the common. As if this were not enough to satisfy the longings of any well-regulated boy, Mrs. Hawkins had promised to turn up the sleeves and trousers of Billy's new suit, which was a twelve year old size and much too large for Billy, who was only ten.

All of these good things had come to Billy since his mother had been taken to the sanitarium, three days before; to say nothing of the exciting things that had happened at the boarding-house in the meantime.

Billy whistled cheerily as he strapped up the new trousers as high as he could, wondering if Mrs. Hawkins couldn't take a tuck in them somewhere to keep the seat from sagging half-way to the knees. Billy's mother had said that the clothes would exactly fit by next year. She was too poor to buy things that he would outgrow in six

months. Billy couldn't understand her reasoning, for his clothes were always worn out before he had grown into them.

As Billy parted his yellow hair, and plastered it on each side of his broad, tanned forehead, he felt a sense of luxury because he had the full mirror to look into instead of the uncertain space under his mother's arms that usually fell to his share while his mother arranged her wisp of fair hair.

It was certainly very nice to have one's mother in a sanitarium. It had happened in this way. Four days ago Billy's mother, who was very thin and much too young looking to have a tall son like Billy, had gone to see Madame Zeus who told fortunes by the stars. It had been chilly in Madame Zeus's room and Billy's mother had taken cold. In the morning she was so weak that she had eaten breakfast upstairs, and Mrs. Hawkins had sent for the doctor. When the doctor came he put his ear on Billy's mother's chest and asked a

great many questions. By and by Billy's mother burst out crying. Then Billy wanted to fight the doctor, but his mother sent him away and said he couldn't have any dessert for dinner he was such a bad boy.

That was Billy's mother's way. She never seemed to understand things. When Billy wanted to take care of her she laughed at him and called him either silly or naughty. Sometimes he built things for her from shingles and pieces of board that he found in an empty lot, and with tacks that he pulled from the carpet. But his mother said the things were trash and gave them to Mrs. Hawkins to burn up.

Billy did not feel that he and his mother were very well acquainted. You see she was busy all day long selling hosiery at the Star Store, and when she came home in the evening there were so many things to be done that there was no time to get acquainted. She liked to play games of five hundred in Mrs. Hawkins' parlour or

in Miss Perkins' room. Sometimes there was a little washing or pressing to be done in the kitchen, and often Billy's mother was too tired to talk, and Billy was expected to keep very quiet while she lay on the bed and read by the gaslight, which Mrs. Hawkins kept small and dim by means of an application of wax to the burner.

Once Billy dug out the wax so there was a beautiful big blaze. His mother watched him and when he finished called him a "clever boy." Then she hugged him. Billy felt a warm wave of strange emotion sweep over him from head to foot, when his mother's thin arms gathered him up against her. Even yet the thought of that time gave him a queer feeling in his chest, and made his face hot.

For a month Billy and his mother enjoyed the beautiful big blaze from the gas jet. Then Mrs. Hawkins discovered it. The discovery was followed by an exciting scene. Mrs. Hawkins threatened to adver-

tise the room. Billy's mother cried and declared that Billy had dug out the wax that very day. She said she would have prevented it if she had been at home; so Mrs. Hawkins finally calmed down and balanced her account with Billy by giving him no ice cream on Sundays for a month.

Billy wondered why his mother didn't tell Mrs. Hawkins the truth about the gas. Perhaps it was because she was little and thin and young looking and Mrs. Hawkins was big and fat. But then, Billy wasn't afraid of Mrs. Hawkins. He would have fought her for his mother so there was really no need of his mother's being afraid to tell the truth.

All this happened a long time ago, almost as long ago as Christmas, and Christmas was in the winter. Now the leaves were coming out on the maple trees, and Billy's mother had been taken to a sanitarium. A nurse in a striped dress, a white apron and a cunning cap, and a young man in a white uniform had come for her. She seemed

very ill, so ill that the nurse and the young man had walked one on each side of her, holding her by the arms when they went down the stairs. The nurse had looked kind and had called his mother "dear," so Billy felt sure she was being well taken care of.

After she went the health officers came, and the house was fumigated from attic to cellar. Mrs. Hawkins fussed and scolded, insisting that she never heard of such a thing as fumigating a house and scaring the inmates half to death just because a woman boarder happened to have a cough that couldn't possibly be "catching."

The doctors didn't pay the least attention to Mrs. Hawkins. They said it was "the law in New England" and they sprayed the walls and went through every room with their evil smelling drugs. Then Mrs. Hawkins wrote to Billy's uncle Nathan, who owned the farm in Maine, and Billy was expecting him to send or come for him at any moment. As if this were

not enough to fill his cup of joy, his mother had told him that there were thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents in an old shoe in the closet that Billy was to feel free to use in a case of emergency. Billy wasn't sure just what a case of emergency was, but thought it had something to do with a hospital.

Besides all this, everybody had made much of him. Mrs. Hawkins had let him scrape the cake pan that morning, and the housemaid had filled his pockets with raisins, warning him not to tell. All of these things, with the fact that he had just finished this wonderful shirt waist box made from shingles and the remaining tacks in the carpet, and left it at Miss Mabie's door, combined to make him the happiest boy in the world as he ran down the three flights of stairs that led to the basement dining-room.

CHAPTER II

BILLY HATES THE WORLD



THE boarders were already at the table when Billy entered the dining-room. There was Madame Zeus, very thin and pale, at the head. Beside her sat Miss Perkins, who had been sent to California by the *Daily Clarion* because she was the most popular saleswoman. Billy had collected coupons for her for months and so had Mr. James and the other boarders. Then there were the two married ladies whose husbands travelled, and who had nothing to do from morning until night but sit in rocking-chairs and read stories. And there was Mr. James who was always talking to Miss Mabie, who had apple-red cheeks and an adorable way of saying "little man." Billy was

going to marry her when he grew up. He hadn't told her about it yet, but he made things for her and took care of her. She was constantly dropping her handkerchief, and said she didn't know what she should do without Billy to pick it up for her, which proved that she really needed him, and gave Billy good reason for thinking he would marry her when he was a man.

"Oh," said Miss Mabie, as Billy seated himself next to the empty chair in which Mrs. Hawkins would sit later, "I found such a beautiful box outside my door just now. It said 'shirt waists' on the outside in the plainest writing I ever saw. I think you must have made it for me, Mr. James."

Now Billy had been a trifle doubtful about the box. Somehow the shingles looked rough, and he could not smooth them down with his little plane, although he had planed all the mahogany finish off the chair in his room trying to do it. He

hadn't intended to let Miss Mabie know that he had made the box at all, but surely if she thought Mr. James, who was a man, made it, it must be a pretty good box after all.

Billy felt very red and self-conscious. If he told Miss Mabie, he was sure that the other boarders would know how he felt about her and he knew Mr. James would laugh. He was so nervous and excited that he tipped over a glass of water and it splashed Miss Perkins' best bodice.

"Oh, the careless child," cried Miss Perkins. "He ought to be shut in the attic with the rats; he hasn't any more manners."

Now this was a cruel thing for Miss Perkins to say, especially at a time when Billy was trying to appear very grown up. He was so angry and humiliated that he could not help answering back.

"I'm not afraid of rats, Miss Perkins. I'm not an old maid," he said saucily.

Miss Mabie looked at him reprovingly

and bit her under lip. Then she turned to Mr. James.

"Did you make the box, Mr. James?" she asked.

"Of course I did," replied Mr. James, laughing down at her.

"He did not," cried Billy, forgetting his shyness in his indignation. "I made it myself."

"Oh, I'm surprised that such a young man could make such a splendid box and do such fine printing. I needed a shirt waist box very much," said Miss Mabie.

Billy felt hot and red. He was sure everybody was looking at him. But he resolved to make another box for Miss Mabie that very night, if he could find some more shingles and some tacks. Perhaps he could pull up the tacks in the hall carpet after everybody had gone to bed. He wondered if he could hammer so quietly that nobody could hear. He would try it anyway. It would be a wonderful box.

He would paint it in all the colours in his paint box.

Billy had just reached this decision when Mrs. Hawkins, flushed and breathless, came into the dining-room. She sat down beside Billy with a flounce, then turned a pair of flashing black eyes upon him.

“ I declare, Billy Lewis, you are the naughtiest child I ever knew. What do you think he has done? ” she continued, addressing the boarders and throwing out her hands, careless of the glass of celery directly in front of her. “ This boy, this naughty, bad child whose mother is sick and in a sanitarium, has pulled every tack out of the carpet in his room, and has ruined one of my best mahogany chairs. He has planed the mahogany right off from it. What shall I do to him? Have I a right to punish him? It is wilful naughtiness and he deserves a spanking. Have I the right? ”

Everybody looked shocked and surprised. Billy flushed guiltily and stared at his

plate. He knew that Mrs. Hawkins' charges were true, but he wished she would not talk about spankings before Miss Mabie. He was too big for spankings; he was in the fourth grade and had read *Ivanhoe*, which everybody knows is a grown up book with very long words in it.

Miss Perkins, who had been trying to dry the lace on her best bodice with her napkin, turned to Billy and said in a most trying voice:

"Why, Mrs. Hawkins, it is hard to believe that a child who has been treated with the consideration that you have shown Billy should do such a wicked thing as to destroy your furniture or pull up your carpet. There seems to be no excuse for such actions, whatever."

Billy glanced sheepishly at Miss Mabie. He thought she looked back at him coldly. Even she did not understand, and Miss Perkins was looking down at him in the most aggravating grown-up manner that can be imagined. Billy wished he had splashed

two glasses of water over her bodice. She and everybody else had turned against him. It was certainly hard for him to have had all this happen at a time when he was feeling so manly and important.

“When does his uncle come for him, Mrs. Hawkins?” inquired Mr. James in a supercilious voice.

“I have had a letter from him to-day, and I warn you, Master Billy, that you’ll have to toe the mark when you live with your great-uncle. If you don’t he’ll send you back here to ‘The Society’ quicker’n a wink. I know something about the way they bring up boys in Maine, and your great-uncle is not an easy man.”

“I’m not afraid of uncle Nathan, Mrs. Hawkins; I could lick him.”

Everybody looked shocked. Madame Zeus opened her pale eyes very wide and sighed.

“Mrs. Hawkins,” she said, “I cast this child’s horoscope this morning. I have read his future in the stars and —”

“ Oh, stop your stringing, Mrs. Zeus,” interrupted Billy. “ You can’t read anything in the stars. I’ve watched and there are no reading letters in them at all, excepting now and then a quick dash. Do you think I’m going to give you a dollar for one of your old horoscopes? ”

Mrs. Hawkins clasped her hands in despair. Madame Zeus was one of her best paying boarders and was very sensitive. She had brought Mrs. Hawkins a great number of boarders who felt that it was a privilege to live under the same roof with a woman who could predict the misfortunes that might be threatening. Several times she had saved Mrs. Hawkins from serious accidents. Once Mrs. Hawkins would have been run over by a street car if she had crossed Washington Street on a certain day, and again when Mrs. Hawkins had planned to take a railroad trip Madame Zeus had forewarned her and she had remained at home. There was no way of knowing what would have happened if she

had gone, but Madame Zeus said it would have been something serious.

“Don’t pay any attention to the boy, Madame Zeus,” said Mrs. Hawkins. “He is very naughty. I shall tell his uncle to take away his tools if he doesn’t want everything on his place ruined. I haven’t half examined his room yet, so can’t tell all the mischief he has done. But I hope you’ll all keep your doors locked. I shall certainly warn his uncle that he is a dangerous boy to trust with tools.”

Something hard came up in Billy’s throat and stopped. His mouth pulled down in the strangest way at the corners. He wanted to defend himself, to tell Mrs. Hawkins that he would pay for the chair because his mother had left more than thirteen dollars in a shoe for an emergency. But the fear of losing his hammer and saw, and his beloved plane choked him, and he couldn’t explain.

“He’s sulking,” said Mr. James. “I know something about Maine uncles, young

man. He'll take away your tools, and if you don't behave he'll put you into girl's clothes. In Maine boys go to school every single day and they study at night after their chores are done. When a boy misbehaves in school he has to sit with the girls and the other boys call him 'Sis.' "

Even Miss Mabie giggled. Billy feared that he was going to burst out crying. Why wouldn't they leave him alone for just a minute, he wondered, so that he could swallow the lump in his throat and explain. Instead, everybody looked at him to see if he were sorry, and they were going to tell his great-uncle Nathan to take his tool chest away.

He wished the house would take fire and burn them all up. He'd be glad. He'd run upstairs faster than lightning and save his tool chest. Then they'd all be dead and couldn't tell his uncle. No, they wouldn't all be dead, for he might come back and save Miss Mabie, but he'd leave the others to perish in the flames, all ex-

cepting Mrs. Hawkins. She didn't understand that he didn't mean to plane the varnish off the chair. He'd save her because he remembered that she had a large, nice lap and used to dress him when he was smaller and couldn't lace his own shoes very well. She used to help him a good deal, so that he wasn't late to school so very often. He might save Mrs. Hawkins. Yes, and the married ladies — he would come back and save them, because they had given him the tool chest. He might possibly save Miss Perkins because he liked to hear her tell about California. And Madame Zeus, perhaps he would rescue her. She had a nice cupboard in her room with things in it for light housekeeping. He would save her with the others, but he would leave Mr. James to perish in the flames. Yet if he did Miss Mabie would feel unhappy, because Mr. James had given her a real nice ring. Perhaps he would save Mr. James. Then Miss Mabie would say, "My brave little man, you have

saved us all," and she would lean over him and cry. They'd all cry because he would be dead. That would be the best way to end it all. He'd rescue everybody but himself, and then they'd feel bad because they had said they'd tell his uncle Nathan to take away his tools.

Just as he had saved them all and was feeling a trifle better, he looked up and met Miss Mabie's eyes. They were looking at him in such a kind way that he suddenly grew hot again. If only she wouldn't look as if she felt sorry, when his mouth was pulling down so at the corners, it would be easier.

Suddenly one of the married ladies who did not understand little boys, but thought she did, looked at Billy and said:

"Poor little fellow, it isn't his fault that he's been spoiled."

Now everybody knows that when one feels just ready to burst out crying like a girl one doesn't want anybody to take one's part. One would rather everybody was

against one or would just talk about other things until one felt better. Billy knew he'd cry in another second and then what would Miss Mabie think? Something must be done. But what? In the middle of the table there was a glass dish with apples in it. Suddenly Billy reached for an apple, although he knew that he ought to finish his corn beef and cabbage first. He reached for it recklessly and the next moment another glass of water was splashing Miss Perkins' bodice and pouring into her lap. Miss Perkins screamed and cuffed Billy. Billy burst out laughing and the lump in his throat suddenly dissolved.

"Dear, dear, dear," gasped Miss Hawkins, sopping up the water with her napkin. "I must write his uncle to-night."

"Yes, Mrs. Hawkins," said Miss Mabie in oh, such a cold, severe voice, "I am afraid Billy is a naughty boy. Only a very naughty *little* boy reached for things at the table and eats his dessert first."

She didn't call Billy a man now, but he

didn't care. The lump had gone. They could tell his great-uncle Nathan what they chose, but he would take his tools and run away. He would never, never come back. Nobody wanted him, not even Miss Mabie.

Now that he thought of it he didn't want to go to his great-uncle Nathan's anyway, even if there were cows and horses.

Once when his mother had not been tired, and was not going to play cards or to see a play, and when there was neither washing nor pressing to be done, she had told Billy about his great-uncle Nathan.

When she was a little girl she had lived with him and had been very unhappy. She had to darn a great many hours a day and when she didn't darn she sewed carpet rags. Billy wondered if his great-uncle Nathan would expect him to sew carpet rags. He felt that he should hate sewing carpet rags worse than anything in the world. He began to hate his great-uncle Nathan even more than he hated Miss Perkins who had struck him, or Mr. James

who had laughed at him. He would never, never go to live with his uncle for they would tell him about the chair and the tacks, and then his tools would be taken away and he would have to sit in the corner and sew carpet rags. Yet what was he to do? Uncle Nathan might be coming to-night. There was no time to lose. Billy felt that he must decide at once what was to be done and do it.

He slipped from his chair and ran up the basement steps to the front door. He had read of boys who had run away to seek their fortunes. Sometimes they went to sea and sometimes they went out west to California. He thought he should prefer going to California. It would be fun to dig and dig for gold. And there were mountains in California. Yes, he decided he would run away to California. But first he must pack his things; boys always carried a bundle when they ran away.

CHAPTER III

BILLY RUNS AWAY



BILLY went to the little hall room on the third floor of Mrs. Hawkins' house. He crept up as quietly as he could. He felt as if he could not endure the sight of any of the people whom he hated and who hated him. It would have been even harder for him to have run across the woman who had spoken kindly, and whom he felt that he hated worst of all.

He took off the new suit that was two sizes too large for him and put on his old one. Then he looked over his things. He would take the new suit and shoes and stockings and a comb. In the closet were some shells he had picked up on the sea-

shore. He would take those, too. He put them all on the bed. He would take his story of Robinson Crusoe. Mrs. Hawkins had given him the story on his birthday. It was very exciting and he carried the book to bed with him. He pulled his tool chest — the joint gift of the ladies whose husbands travelled — from under the bed. They were really very good tools. Mrs. Hawkins sometimes borrowed them. The box would be too heavy to carry, but he would take the saw and the hammer, the plane and the wrench.

He took a pillow-case from the bed and put the things into it, but the saw burst through. The pillow-case evidently wouldn't do. He rummaged in the untidy closet and found an old-fashioned travelling telescope. It was the very thing. It would hold everything.

He hurriedly packed the new suit, the shoes and stockings, the shells, tools and book. Then he strapped the bag, put on his hat and started toward the stairs. But

the bag was very heavy. He was afraid he could not carry it far. He opened it and took out the new shoes and stockings. He had his old shoes and if they gave out he would go barefooted. It was summer and a great many boys went barefooted. If it was still too heavy he decided to take out the new suit, by and by, after he had started.

He crept cautiously down the stairs. Mrs. Hawkins' boarders were still in the basement dining-room. They were eating fruit now or rice pudding with raisins in it. He had watched Mrs. Hawkins pick over the raisins that afternoon. He slipped cautiously out the front door and started up the street carrying the clumsy bag.

A street car passed the corner. If he took a car it would be easier to get far away from the house, so they could not find him. But he had no money, and as yet he had not learned the excitement of stealing a ride. He remembered the money that his mother had hidden in the old shoe.

He decided to go back and take a little of it and Mrs. Hawkins could have the rest to pay for the chair. Surely his mother would not mind since she was in a sanitarium, and he was going to California. He saw a strange little girl standing at the corner, and asked her to watch his grip. Then he ran back to the boarding-house. He met Miss Perkins on the stairs.

“Why, hello, Billy,” she said. “I’ll come up in a little while and tuck you into bed.” She seemed to have forgotten about her best bodice that he had splashed. But why did she want to tuck him into bed; he was ten years old and too old to be tucked in. She probably wanted to be sure he was there so that his great-uncle Nathan could get him.

He ran upstairs and found the money in the shoe. He took the silver and left the rest. He intended to walk most of the way to California — he had seen it on the maps and it was not very far.

When he reached the corner the little girl

was still watching the bag. He wished he had time to stop and talk with her, for she had blue eyes and curly hair and a cheerful way of speaking.

She said, "Hello, boy! You are an awful fast runner."

This made him feel very proud. He took the money from his pocket and finding a nickel told her to get some candy. Then he got on the car and rode away. The little girl stood on the corner, smiling at him, and waving her hand until the car disappeared. After all Billy felt that he didn't hate everybody. There was the little girl with the blue eyes and the nice way of speaking, who had said he was a fast runner. He wondered what she would have said if he had told her he was running away to California. Maybe she would have run away with him.

Somehow Billy felt lonely after he was out of sight of the little girl. He remembered that Robinson Crusoe had a man Friday, and thought maybe before long he

would find a man Friday, too. He felt like going back and asking the little girl if she knew about Friday and would run away to California with him. But the corner was too near Mrs. Hawkins' boarding-house. Uncle Nathan was coming to take him away and Billy was afraid to go back.



CHAPTER IV

BILLY MEETS THE TALL BOY



BILLY had been riding for what seemed a very long time when the conductor touched him on the shoulder.

“Where are you going? This is Oxbridge Square and the end of the line.”

It was fortunate the conductor had not waited for Billy to say where he was going, for Billy couldn't have told him.

“I'll get off here,” said Billy.

“Transfer?” asked the conductor.

“No, thank you,” said Billy.

He climbed down the steps, dragging the awkward telescope with him, and found himself in a large square with cars coming and going in every direction. One side of

the square was bordered with great brick buildings surrounded by green lawns and brick walls. Through the arching gateways he could see young men wandering about the lawns. He recognized the place as the University. If his father had lived, Billy would have been sent here to college.

The boy looked about irresolutely. Throngs of people were getting off and on the cars, and he wondered which car would take him farthest in the direction of California. California was in the west, but Billy wasn't sure which way was the west. He was confused, for the sun had gone down and had left the sky red in the direction that Billy thought was north. If he only dared to ask the direction of California from the policeman across the street! But Billy's common sense told him that the officer would think it strange for a little boy to be starting alone for California, when it was almost dark.

As he stood, hesitating, he saw a tall boy leaning against a nearby building. Billy

noticed that his clothes seemed too small for him. He had long arms with red hands dangling at the ends of them. There was a red stubble on his upper lip and he had pale, shifty eyes. Suddenly he discovered Billy looking at him, and winked. Billy's face flamed. He wanted to run away, for the wink seemed to say: "Hello, Billy. Running away? Hate everybody? Oh, I know all about you." It seemed to sneer at Billy's youth and ignorance. Billy picked up his bag and started on; he wanted to get away from that tall boy with the wink. Some instinct warned Billy to look out for him. He turned the first corner, but had gone less than a block when somebody seized his arm.

"Say, kid, that bag's too heavy for you. Where're you going with it?"

Billy looked up startled. There was the tall boy with the sneering eyes. His mouth was large and his face was thin. His coat was buttoned closely over his chest, and was so tight that it strained the buttons.

His trousers were tight. Everything he wore was old and shabby excepting his shoes, which were large and new and bright yellow. His face and hands were covered with freckles that matched the colour of his hair and shoes. Billy pulled his shoulder free and stopped.

“Let me carry the bag for you, you little mucker,” said the tall boy. “It’s too much for you.”

The words were reassuring, but the voice did not ring true, and Billy held on to the bag.

“Know your way?” asked the tall boy.

“Yes.”

“Far?”

“Not very.”

Then the tall boy surprised Billy.

“Say, young ’un, you’re running away, an’ the cop’s going to get you sure if you go ’round hesitating the way you did on the square. Where’re you going?”

The words surprised the truth from Billy. “California.”

“California!” The tall boy laughed. “Well, kid, you’ve got your nerve. How’ll you get there? Walk? Say, have you any idee where California is?”

“It’s the other side of the Rocky Mountains, and it takes a week to get there. Do you know Miss Perkins?”

“Naw, who’s she?”

“She’s the lady who won the prize for being the most popular saleslady, and they sent her to California and she was gone four weeks and saw everything. I know all about California.”

The tall boy laughed again.

“Got your transportation?”

“My what?”

“Your transportation; your ticket.”

“No. I’m going as far west as the street cars’ll take me. Then I’ll walk or take a stagecoach. They drive stagecoaches in the Rockies.”

“Scissors!” squeaked the tall boy, puckering his big mouth and throwing up his right hand in mock daintiness, the

tips of the fingers together. "Oh, I say, scissors!" Something about the words and the gesture recalled Miss Perkins when she was talking to Mr. James, and Billy laughed in spite of himself and his suspicion that the tall boy was making fun of his ignorance. They walked on in silence, broken at last by the wheedling voice of the tall boy.

"Say, kid, I'm seedy-looking just now but I'm all right when I'm in luck. Just now I'm out of it. But I can help you, for I've got experience. Just remember that. I can help you better'n any one else, and being out of work I'll make it my duty to do it. First of all, how much money have you?"

Billy started to take the silver from his pocket, but just then a good-looking policeman turned the corner.

"Oh, never mind. Make a guess. I don't want to see the colour of your money." The policeman eyed the tall boy sharply.

"I've got three or four dollars, I guess. I didn't count it."

The tall boy licked his lips.

"Had your supper?"

"Yes."

"Ever eat a college ice?"

"Yes."

"Want one?"

"I don't know; I guess I'd just as soon."

"All right, kiddie. Follow me. I know a place where they're great." The tall boy took Billy's bag and in spite of his better judgment, Billy followed him without protesting. They walked several blocks along the narrow streets roughly paved with cobblestones and lined with poor tenements, the doorsteps thronged with ragged women and children. Finally they came to a small restaurant flaunting a wonderful bill of fare on a sign-board in front of the door.

"Here's the place and it's all right. Come along. I haven't had supper, so I'll

have something a little substantial while you indulge your craving for college ice, Cornelius."

"My name's Billy," said the small boy, feeling instinctively that he was being made sport of.

"All right, Cornelius, come along," insisted the tall boy.

They went to the back of the restaurant, which was lined on each side with narrow eating-counters and high stools. Billy climbed up on a high stool and his friend mounted a stool beside him.

The tall boy summoned a waiter in a greasy apron.

"Say, Cornelius, a beefsteak broiled to order and some hashed potatoes and blueberry pie. A college ice for the kid and hurry them up."

Billy wondered if the tall boy called everybody Cornelius. "We don't have college ices," replied the waiter, keeping his sharp little eyes on the tall boy.

“ All right, I guess a piece of blueberry pie will do for him, Cornelius.”

Billy was disappointed. On rare Sundays his mother had allowed him to spend a nickel for a college ice at the corner drug store. Blueberry pie did not appeal to him, but an innate politeness prevented his expressing disappointment to his host.

In due time the steak and potatoes and blueberry pie arrived. The tall boy had a wonderful appetite. He reminded Billy of a hungry dog. It was terrible to see him eat. When he had finished there wasn't a morsel of steak, potatoes or bread left. Just as he was finishing the last mouthful of blueberry pie, he thrust his hand into his trousers' pocket. Then he searched hurriedly and with apparent excitement through the pockets of coat and trousers.

“ I haven't a cent, kiddie,” he exclaimed after a thorough search. “ I must have lost it, and we've got to pay or they'll arrest us, sure. Say, could you lend me some? ”

“ I don't know,” hesitated Billy, hoping

that the waiter would come back and that the tall boy would explain to him.

But the tall boy had no such intention.

“Quick, now,” he commanded in sharp tones. “They’ll have the cops after us in a minute more if we don’t pay. Hand me the money.”

Billy took a handful of money from his trousers’ pocket.

“Will fifty cents be enough?” he asked, dubiously.

“Don’t dare to risk it. Give me a dollar. I’ll pay you in the morning.”

Billy wondered how he could pay him, for he expected to be well on his way to California by morning. However he counted out a dollar for the tall boy and thrust the remainder of his scant store into his pocket. The waiter presented the check. The tall boy pulled Billy’s money from his pocket with an indifferent air, counted out sixty-five cents for the waiter, and returned the balance to his pocket.

They climbed down from the high stools and went into the street.

It was night and Billy rather dreaded the time when he would be left to wander on alone in the darkness. He wondered where he should sleep. His thoughts turned to the hall bedroom at Mrs. Hawkins' and he wondered if Miss Perkins would come up to put him to bed. She treated him like a baby and Billy felt very much grown up. No, he resolved he would not go back to be coddled and scolded alternately by Miss Perkins and the other boarders and finally be carried off to Maine by his uncle Nathan to learn to sew carpet rags and to mend. It was more manly, now that his mother was in a sanitarium, to be running away to California. He would not give up. Perhaps the tall boy would tell him where he could sleep before he left him.

To tell the truth, the tall boy had no idea of leaving him and presently Billy was

to know with what friendliness this young man regarded him.

"Planned where you're going to stay tonight?" asked the tall boy after they had walked three or four blocks.

"No, I was just wondering if you knew of any place around here. I don't believe I'll start for California before morning."

"Umph," said the tall boy. "Maybe I can fix you. I've got a bang-up place in the country. Not fashionable, but private. Come along with me."

"Will it cost much?" asked Billy, cautiously.

"Didn't you buy the dinners? I hope you don't think I'll have you doing more than your share. I'm square, kid. Follow me and you'll wear diamonds."

So Billy followed the tall boy, who politely insisted upon carrying the heavy bag, although Billy expostulated again and again. But the tall boy said that he liked being what he called "a good thing."

After they had walked what seemed to

Billy many miles, they came to a tall, high board fence. "My place is there," said the tall boy, with a vague wave of his hand. "That's my estate."

They walked along the fence, coming at last to an open space large enough to squeeze through. The tall boy ordered Billy through the hole. "Extensive grounds, every convenience, city water, basement kitchen, convenient to cars, and quiet," he announced, following Billy through the fence.

It was not at all the kind of place Billy had expected to see, although to be sure in the darkness he could tell very little about it. Judging from what he could see, however, they were in a big empty lot. An arc light from the street showed a pile of barrels that seemed to have held cement or plaster, a piano box, such as is sometimes used by workmen to protect their tools, a hogshead and what seemed to be the partially finished foundation for a large building.

“The place is only begun. Started out to build a factory,” said the tall boy, apologetically. “Got out of money and had to quit work. But mighty comfortable, just the same. Here’s the hotel.” He pulled at one end of the piano box. It swung back and he crawled inside. The next moment he had lighted a candle stuck in a bottle that rested on a rude shelf fastened across one end of the box. Billy saw that the floor was covered with a foot or more of excelsior.

“Come right in,” said the tall boy, kneeling down and looking back at Billy. “The gable roof won’t inconvenience you the way it does me. Come in; it’s grand, of course, but you’re just as welcome.”

Billy hesitated on the threshold of the strange bedchamber. On the rough walls various articles of wearing apparel hung from spikes. There were soiled neckties, collars, a ragged coat and plaid waistcoat. On a box in the corner at one end there was some broken china.

“Come in, come in,” called the tall boy to Billy. “Let’s see what you’ve got in your grip. I gather my goods from the store yards outside,” and he cackled unpleasantly. “I take what others don’t want. They dump them in my yard in the dead of night. I go over them in the morning and pick out the valuables. Behold the collection. Come in.”

Billy saw that his companion had begun to unfasten the straps about the telescope and, more to protect his belongings from this street vandal than anything else, he crept into the piano box.

“Say, kid, let’s make a bargain,” said the tall boy as he pulled the cover from Billy’s bag. “Let’s be partners. I share my house and grounds with you — you share your money bag and travelling outfit with me. I’m easy to let you in on my speculations — but I like you, honest, I do. You’ve got faith. You’ll get the best of the deal, of course, for there’s never any telling what wealth may be dumped at my

door any night, but I'll take you as a partner, Cornelius, because I like you."

Billy was silent. He didn't like being called Cornelius, and he didn't like the way the tall boy carelessly tossed the precious shells into a corner, threw the Robinson Crusoe after them, whacked the side of the piano box with the hammer, and finally began studying the suit of clothes that had made Billy so unhappy.

"These yours?" he asked doubtfully.

"Yes," replied Billy.

"They're almost big enough for me. Might wear 'em if it wasn't for the knickers. Got out of knickers before I left Maine."

"Maine?" exclaimed Billy in surprise.

"Maybe you know my great-uncle Nathan."

"'Deed I do."

"That's why I ran away," said Billy.

"He's coming after me."

"Thought so," chuckled the tall boy, running his long arm into the sleeve of

Billy's coat. "Don't blame you. Said I didn't when I first saw you. Say, you must look like a misfit in these clothes. Where'd you get 'em?"

"Oh, mother gets them two sizes too big so's I can grow into them. I never do. They're always worn out first. Mother's in a sanitarium."

"Is your mother sick?"

"Yes, she's in a sanitarium, I tell you."

"What's the matter with her?"

"I don't know, but it must be awfully catching. I can't go to see her, Mrs. Hawkins said. And they sent for uncle Nathan to take me to Maine. He was going to take my tools away and make me sew carpet rags. Mother had to when she was young. Then she got tired of it and father came along. He was an architect, — an awfully good one, and he could draw like everything. Uncle Nathan didn't like him because he smoked and didn't go to church very much, so mother ran away and mar-

ried father. Father had the fever and died and mother went to work in the Star. She was the head clerk at the hosiery counter, you see, and made fifteen dollars a week. It was more'n Miss Perkins made in the notions, and more than Miss Mabie made in the ribbons, but mother had me to take care of, so she couldn't have very many pretty things. I cost a good deal, you see. Do you like that coat? I think it seems awfully tight for you."

The tall boy had put the coat on while Billy talked. He looked more than ever like an overgrown sausage.

"No, I don't care particularly for it. Do you?"

"No," replied Billy honestly.

"Then I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take it around to a man I know in the morning — the whole suit, you understand — and I think we can get something worth while for the things. What say?"

"I don't care," replied Billy. "Nobody can make me wear it, now mother's in a

sanitarium and I'm going to California. I'd *like* to sell it."

"All right," said the tall boy. "Now where's your money?"

Billy took out his change and counted it carefully. "Two dollars and eighty-five cents. That's a good deal, isn't it?"

"Better'n nothing," said the tall boy. "I usually keep mine in my belt," and he showed Billy a crude pocket sewed into the band of his trousers. "It's safer at night." He took from his pocket the change from the dollar and held out his hand for Billy's money. "I'll take care of it for you. It's dangerous to let a kid run around loose with so much money on his person."

Billy hesitated, but familiarity had worn the edge from his distrust. He poured the money into his companion's hand and watched him count it into a tobacco pouch that he carried, and which he afterwards tucked into the little pocket.

"Now, lights out! Make yourself comfortable, kid," cried the tall boy. He

stretched himself on the rough excelsior that covered the floor, and Billy did the same, feeling unusually old and manly. A few minutes later the tall boy was snoring comfortably, but Billy lay awake until long into the night, turning rather uneasily on his hard bed and wondering what they were doing at the boarding-house and whether or not uncle Nathan had come. In spite of his instinctive distrust of the tall boy, he reviewed his day with satisfaction.



CHAPTER V

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE TALL BOY



T was barely daybreak when the tall boy was up. His preparations for the day were of necessity meagre. He had slept in his clothes, with the exception of the new yellow shoes. These he now placed cautiously outside the door of the box bedroom, glancing slyly at Billy as he did so. After disposing of his shoes he carefully gathered together certain articles that he had taken from the telescope the evening before. Billy's new suit followed the yellow shoes, then Billy's shoes and stockings were added to the collection, together with the handkerchiefs and underwear that Billy had brought with him and the cap that he had worn. The hammer, wrench, and

saw were evidently about to join the other things when Billy stirred restlessly and, opening his eyes, demanded the time.

The tall boy dropped the hammer. "Too early for you to think of getting up, Cornelius. I'll call you for breakfast. Goin' to get a drink of water myself." Dropping the hammer, he crept toward the door, while Billy, sleepily suspicious, reached for his tools, drew them close against his chest, and turning on his side, dropped to sleep again.

Outside, the tall boy muttered under his breath, as he repacked the bag, and with his shoes in his hand walked gingerly to the hole in the fence through which he disappeared.

Billy meantime dreamed that he was clinging to a precipice in the Rocky Mountains, while the tall boy leered at him from the moon, after swallowing his hammer, saw and wrench without the least inconvenience.

Meantime, while Billy slept, there was

confusion and excitement at Mrs. Hawkins' boarding-house. Miss Perkins going to Billy's room at nine o'clock discovered the bed empty, the bureau drawers ransacked, and the general appearance of preparations for a sudden departure prevailing. She rushed at once to Mrs. Hawkins, who came panting up the stairs, followed by Mr. James.

Investigation proved that Billy had gone, and gone with the intention of remaining away for some time. This was evident, for Mrs. Hawkins knew to a hair-pin the possessions of each and every one of her boarders and it took but a few minutes for her to discover the exact number of things that were missing from Billy's room.

"And his mother had paid his board a week in advance," she exclaimed regretfully. "He might have stayed on as well as not."

"He was probably lonesome, poor child," said Miss Perkins, serenely unaware that she had had hand or voice in

Billy's departure. "Do you think he's gone to his uncle Nathan or to the sanitarium?"

"He may have heard us talking about the letter," said Mrs. Hawkins, drawing an envelope addressed in an old fashioned handwriting, from her pocket. "Did I read it to you, Miss Perkins?"

Miss Perkins shook her head.

"Well, this is what his uncle Nathan writes in reply to my letter. You know I promised Billy's mother to write immediately to Mr. Hackett to come after Billy," panted Mrs. Hawkins, "and being a woman of my word I did write — the very day after she left. I told him everything, feeling it my duty and being brought up that way. I said that Mrs. Lewis, one of my most respected and popular boarders, had been suddenly taken very sick. I said that she wanted Billy to be with blood relations until she was able to look after him again, and would Mr. Hackett come after him whenever it was convenient and

that there was no hurry as the child wasn't in the way and his board had been paid for a week in advance — and that his mother had a week's board coming to her that he could board out if he saw fit, although I should charge a stranger more as the room was higher priced with one person in it. And," — Mrs. Hawkins had a way of holding the floor by interjecting an "and" when her flow of language ran out, merely to suggest to her listeners that if they would wait patiently until she could get her breath there would be something of interest to follow.

"And," — repeated Mrs. Hawkins, as Miss Perkins was about to speak, raising her hand to further emphasize the fact that she had not finished, but was merely waiting for breath to continue, "*And* I told him we all loved the child and that as his board was paid a week in advance he might as well eat out the bill, being conscientious and believing in everybody's getting what is coming to them. And — "

But Miss Perkins *would* be heard. "Do you think he has gone to his uncle's, Mrs. Hawkins?" she asked in the concise manner of the successful business woman. "The question is, 'Where is Billy?'"

"Yes," said Mr. James sniggering. "It's like, 'How old is Ann,' isn't it?"

"Don't frivol, Mr. James, please," said Miss Perkins, severely. "Perhaps at this moment he is walking the streets penniless and hungry."

"Oh, not hungry," interjected Mr. James. "He ate a good supper. And as for crying, not Billy. I'll bet on him, Miss Perkins."

"Did he have any money, Mrs. Hawkins?"

Mrs. Hawkins hemmed. That afternoon she had discovered the few bills and change hidden in the toe of the old shoe in the closet. She had been about to put it away in some safer place when one of the housemaids had come in and startled her.

"I know for a fact that his mother left

money in this room," said Mrs. Hawkins. "In fact I know for a certainty that there was thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents in the toe of a shoe in the closet. We'll look, and we can all bear each other witness that nobody takes a penny." The sound of her voice was lost as she bent to search among the discarded toys and odds and ends of wearing apparel for the shoe that she had thrown hurriedly into the corner of the closet when the housemaid had appeared at the door.

"Here's the shoe and — and — and there's only part of the money! The silver's gone!"

"Do you think he stole it, Mrs. Hawkins?" exclaimed Miss Perkins.

"It was here at five o'clock. I counted it myself; three dollars and ninety-five cents in change, besides two five-dollar bills. This is a shock, Miss Perkins."

Miss Perkins agreed with Mrs. Hawkins, but Mr. James waited to pass upon Billy's crime.

“ You would have given it to him finally, Mrs. Hawkins? ”

“ After writing to his mother,” answered Mrs. Hawkins severely.

“ But if the boy was leaving and needed it? ”

“ Needed it? He didn’t need it. What business had he to be leaving with his board paid in advance anyway and a letter from his great-uncle in my own pocket saying that if Billy didn’t have the means to get to Maine, he’d send him a ticket, and that if he proved to be a useful boy he could pay it back in a few weeks. I intended to write and tell Mr. Hackett that Billy’s mother had left in such a hurry and was so weak that there hadn’t been a chance for directions but that she had left upwards of thirteen dollars which she would have wanted us to use for the boy — and — ”

“ But,” exclaimed Mr. James.

“ And,” panted Mrs. Hawkins.

“ But what’s the difference if — ” began Mr. James.

“ And,” interrupted Mrs. Hawkins, “ and I said I’d send the money to Billy’s great-uncle in a money order that would cost ten cents; or if he thought best I’d trust it to Billy. But now — ”

“ I’m glad that the child had enough to buy food and lodging with, Mrs. Hawkins,” Miss Perkins interrupted. “ He possibly had reasons for leaving. He may have gone to his mother and he may have gone to Maine. The fact that he didn’t take all of the money shows that he had a definite purpose and probably took exactly what he needed; unless indeed the housemaids — ”

“ The housemaids,” shrilled Mrs. Hawkins. “ I’ve had those girls for two years, Miss Perkins. Don’t try to put it on them. The boy took it and,” with a sniff, “ I’m glad he did. I hope he did; and I hope if he doesn’t find a better place that he’ll come back here, too, when it’s gone. He can board out the six dollars paid in ad-

vance any time he wants to, and I'll be a mother — "

Tears glistened in Mrs. Hawkins' eyes and rolled over her ample cheeks.

" Well, I don't see that we can do anything," said Miss Perkins crisply, " but write to his mother and to his uncle unless, to be sure, we report to the police."

" Oh, no! My business — think of the business, Miss Perkins. This house has never been in the newspapers, although Mrs. Ruggles, next door, was in the papers twice; once for diphtheria and once for burglars, and her business was ruined. I'll write to his mother, poor woman, and to his uncle, but it wouldn't do a mite of good to tell the police, Miss Perkins — and think of the notoriety for all of us. They print everything, Miss Perkins, and you know what was said at the table to-night. It would look awful in the papers, Miss Perkins — and I can't help thinking if we hadn't talked so to Billy, he never would have run away — but you know he's always

been a most independent boy — and it would ruin the business and newspaper pictures are always such poor likenesses — they seem to do it on purpose and you know you don't take a good picture, Miss Perkins — and — ”

“ Well, as far as I can see we'd better wait for events to shape themselves,” said Mr. James. “ And possibly it would be as well to let the other boarders understand that the boy has gone to Maine, as he doubtless has. We're not his legal guardians and it strikes me that it's up to his family to look after him, Mrs. Hawkins. Besides he's ten years old and mighty well able to look after himself,” with which dictum Mr. James bade the two ladies good night and joined the other boarders on the front steps.



CHAPTER VI

BILLY SEEKS HIS FORTUNE



IT was eight o'clock before Billy again opened his eyes, sat up and looked about him, with the vague impression that he was still dreaming. However, as his hand touched the cold steel of the hammer that he had smuggled up beside him, the events of the evening before and of the earlier morning, came back to him. And at this moment it must be confessed that Billy regretted Mrs. Hawkins' boarding-house. In the morning light, California seemed very lonesome and far away, and if Billy had been able to manufacture any good excuse for having, without permission, stayed away all night, he might have gone back to the boarding-house immediately, where his life would

have run along smoothly for ever after, leaving nothing of interest to chronicle. Certain it is that he would have saved himself many hardships and growing up, would have worked behind the counter in The Star Store under the tutelage of Mr. James, or possibly would have become a respected farmer and have inherited the eighty acres belonging to his uncle Nathan in Maine.

But having run away Billy found that it would be very hard to explain the matter to Mrs. Hawkins and her boarders. His face flamed and he clenched his fists as he thought of the teasing that would follow his return. No, he would never go back to her. Better to spend the rest of his days in the piano box with the tall boy. At the thought of the tall boy he looked about him, and missing the new suit of clothes and the telescope, decided that his companion of the night before had gone to the dealer in second hand clothes to dispose of them. Thereupon Billy decided to get up and look about him. First of all he looked

for the money which the tall boy had put into his waist band for safe keeping the night before, and failing to find it after a long and careful search, experienced a qualm of misgiving in spite of his brave self-assertion that his friend would naturally take his pocket-book with him. Finding his shells and his Robinson Crusoe safe in the corner, his confidence in the tall boy was almost fully re-established.

“Guess I’ll look around the place while I’m waiting for him to come back,” he finally said to himself.

Crawling through the door at the end of the piano box he found himself in a large empty lot, surrounded by a high board fence. In the middle of the lot there was an excavation, evidently made some time ago and abandoned. A hydrant, a pile of weather-beaten lumber, some stones and a few tin cans added to the desolate appearance of the place.

Billy examined the hydrant, then brought his wrench from the piano box, and turned

on the water. A tin can made an admirable drinking cup in spite of a suggestion of smoked ham. After drinking two cans of water, Billy bathed his face and hands, drying them on his coat sleeves. He felt refreshed and happy. The fact that he had been able to satisfy his thirst did much for his self confidence. One is always immensely strengthened when one is able, quite unexpectedly, to help one's self.

If the tall boy didn't return presently, Billy resolved to go in search of breakfast. He sat down on a pile of lumber and waited for a long time with gaze fixed on the hole in the fence. The minutes dragged slowly on, and the shadows shortened as the sun crept toward the zenith, but the tall boy did not come.

Finally Billy decided to wait no longer. He must earn or beg some breakfast. Leaving his tools to show his friend that he had gone away for a short time only, he closed the door of the piano box, which he found attached by good iron hinges. Then

he stood a board against it, placing it so that its upper edge ran along a line he scratched with his stick. He crossed the yard, crawled through the opening in the fence and stopped to look about him. He was evidently on the edge of a factory district. A quarter of a mile away, three or four large buildings belched smoke, and he could hear the subdued buzz of machinery. Between him and the buildings, lay a long stretch of marshy ground. He walked down the road to the corner. In the distance were scattering tenements.

Farther on, there was the suggestion of business activity. He walked on briskly, self-conscious at first and fearful of meeting people. On the steps of the first tenement some women were gathered and as he passed he noticed that they were dark and oily skinned, and that they spoke in a strange language. They were probably French, he thought to himself, and walked on with more confidence. Where he was going, he hadn't the vaguest idea; he

simply was trusting that something would turn up. He walked on and on, always directly ahead, fearing that he would lose his way back to the empty lot and the box if he changed his course.

Finally he came to a small railroad station. From this point the road branched in many directions. He hesitated, afraid to take any of the branching roads.

Suddenly a young woman in gray spoke to him. She seemed to have sprung from the ground, but in reality she had left a cab which had driven up unnoticed by Billy.

"Help me with my baggage, boy," she said, and smiled. Beside her were two heavy looking suit cases and a small grip. Billy manfully took the suit cases and followed the girl to the ticket office. She seemed to be in a hurry and from the ticket office rushed across the platform to a waiting train. A coloured man in a blue suit helped her up the steps and reached for the bags that Billy carried. But Billy

shook his head and started up the steps behind the girl.

"Give the porter the baggage, boy," then commanded the girl, turning and smiling at Billy. The porter took the bags and Billy turned away. The girl called to him, "Boy, I haven't paid you! Come back."

For a moment Billy hesitated. He hadn't expected any pay; he didn't want any. Nevertheless he went back, since the girl was waiting. She dropped ten cents into his hand, and before he had time to stammer his thanks, had disappeared.

This was the first money Billy had ever earned, and it had been very easy. He would buy breakfast now, he thought, and then go back to the box and wait for his friend. After all, making money was a very simple matter. He would soon be a rich man and have an automobile of his own.

He whistled as he walked back down the road, and it was a very beaming pair of gray eyes that studied the bill of fare in

the tiny corner restaurant. Everything was conveniently printed with the price after it. Billy ran his finger up and down many times but the things he liked cost more than ten cents. To be sure there was oatmeal for ten cents, but a breakfast of oatmeal alone did not appeal to Billy's imagination. Then there was hash. That, too, cost ten cents, but Billy's appetite for hash had been satiated at Mrs. Hawkins'. There were many kinds of fruit for ten cents, but Billy's hunger called for more than fruit. Finally he decided upon bread and butter and a glass of milk, determining to make twenty cents by dinner-time or even twenty-five. There were no end of fascinating things that could be had for twenty cents, with things still more alluring for twenty-five.

After breakfast Billy walked back to the empty lot and finding the plank still resting against the marked place on the door, sat down to wait for the coming of the tall boy. But it was very hard work

waiting around with nothing to do, and Billy began to fume. He walked up and down the yard, going to the hole in the fence time and again to look anxiously up and down the street for a glimpse of his companion of the night before; and finally, to pass the time more rapidly, he collected a tin can full of rusty nails, drawing or knocking them out of the old lumber with his hammer.

When the whistles at the factories blew for noon Billy went back to the station to earn more money. He hung around for two hours offering his services first to women alone, but finally to men as well; but everybody was in a great hurry or didn't need help and pretended neither to see nor hear the gray-eyed boy in the worn blue suit who ran beside them saying; "Can't I carry your satchel, ma'am?" or "Carry your satchel, sir?" By this time other boys were doing the same thing and one big, ruddy-faced fellow with a shoe blacking outfit slung over his shoulder, took two

of Billy's prospective customers before Billy had realized what was happening.

By three o'clock he was faint with hunger, but he still hung about the station hoping that something would come his way. After all, making a fortune was harder than he had anticipated, and not nearly as exciting. He decided that the moment the tall boy returned he would take his money and start once more for California. Even as he decided a great fear clutched him. He felt certain that the tall boy would not come back. The more he thought of it the more certain he became. It was all clear to Billy, for if the tall boy had acted in good faith, he surely would have come back to see that Billy had money enough to buy his breakfast. Once more Billy hated the world. He would never believe in anybody again, he resolved, and at that moment a young man in an automobile buzzed up, jumped down and called to Billy.

“Hey, kid, watch my car for five minutes.”

The young man disappeared and no sooner had he gone than the car was surrounded by street urchins. One jumped on the step and attempted to blow the horn, but was promptly switched off by the coat collar. Others stood at a distance criticizing and commenting on the little car which puffed and panted impatiently.

Billy, who had studied advertisements until he knew the name and power of almost every car made, was as interested as the others, and as proud as Lucifer that he had been chosen to guard the gleaming red locomotive with its tufted cushions and big puffy-looking tires. It seemed as if the young man had been gone only a minute when he appeared again with a gray-haired lady. The next moment they had whizzed out of sight, and Billy was dashing off in the direction of the restaurant, clutching a quarter between his fingers.

With a boy's lack of control he spent it

all, and went hungry the next day and for half of the next, but his courage did not entirely desert him, even when time had convinced him beyond a doubt that the tall boy would never return. He accepted the fact with stoic philosophy.

“He took my clothes and my money, but he left me his house and the water works,” said Billy to himself, when the truth came home to him. “I’m better off than he is. I’ve got the house and I’m no thief.”

And so it was that Billy’s life on the streets began. He was unused to actual hardship, and it took him many days to learn to look out for himself and to find the devious methods there are by means of which a small boy can earn a living. Many times in the weeks to come he was sick and discouraged and longed to creep back to the little room at the top of Mrs. Hawkins’ boarding-house; but the dread of explanation kept him back.

He learned to look on his hammer, wrench and saw as personal friends and

talked to them, while with the true builder's instinct, he made improvements in his strange lodging-house, searching the dump yards in the vicinity for nails, bits of cloth and pieces of string.

And truly he evolved a most wonderful structure before the winter came. Pieces of tarred paper, canvas, and strips of matting, were nailed to the top of the piano box until it was virtually water proof. Holes that answered for windows were cut high up in the sides, the cut out bits of wood being fastened to the box by leather hinges so that Billy could open or close them at will.

Thick, clean leaves were spread over the floor of the box two feet deep. Billy burrowed in these on chilly nights, managing to keep warm until October flaunted her red banners on the hilltops, and to keep from freezing when on Thanksgiving Day the mercury dropped to zero.

By means of the little saw, he made rude shelves and fastened them to his unfinished

walls, for his candle, his shelves, his book and the numerous other things that he found while rummaging through the dump yards of the city. When December came he decided to enlarge his house. With a broken-handled spade, found in the excavation, he dug a hole in the ground, and by means of much lifting and tugging, stood an empty hogshead over it, carpeted the ground beneath with leaves, constructed a bench and a rude stand of boards, and made for himself a sitting room, which he forthwith decorated with discarded pictures from the Sunday newspapers, branches of autumn leaves and a piece of old fish netting. Day by day the comfort and coziness of the little house increased, until it seemed to Billy more of a home than he had ever known.

Meantime he made friends, for he was a sociable boy, always ready to help the little fellows and to fight the big ones, when there was excuse for fighting — even when, sometimes, the excuse would have been

hard to find. Nobody asked him where he lived or who he was. In the slums one's street and number are seldom called for. He was friends with the boys during the day. After his work was done, he slipped back to his strange camp and read the papers, or hung about the stock theatre in the square, waiting for a chance to get a job that would earn him a pass to the family circle. He soon learned to talk the jargon of the streets and, being adaptable, spoke it when he was with the other boys, dropping it when occasion required, as one drops a foreign tongue when it is no longer necessary.

He thought sometimes of his mother, and wondered if she were back at the hosiery counter in The Star. He intended when he was very rich to take her away into the country with him where she would have nothing to do but change her dress and ride around in an automobile from morning until night. Not that he missed his mother. She had been so little a part of his life

that her passing had been no more than the passing of the other boarders at Mrs. Hawkins'. And now with the struggle to live that went on every moment of his day, there was little time to think of or to miss either her or them. He enjoyed the struggle for existence because he was a man child, strong and young. He was happy, that is as happy as other boys of his age, and he loved his freedom and his work and the long evening hours when he planned the little house which he would build some day, or read the stories of the great prize fights and football matches.



CHAPTER VII

BILLY SECURES A LEASE



IT was early morning in December. Half the night Billy had lain awake fighting the pricks of the frost needles, burrowing deeper and deeper into his nest of leaves and napping now and again, only to awake shivering and pinched with cold. At last just as the gray light of day began to creep through the chinks in the packing box, Billy, with his knees huddled against his chin and only an ear and the hair on his temple visible, fell into a half-frozen stupor. It was the hardest, dreariest night he had passed since he started out into the world to seek his fortune. It had followed a cheerless day. Business had been dull, or it had seemed dull to Billy,

sluggish with cold and hunger. At last he had crept supperless into the box, feeling unable longer to resist the fierce onslaughts of the wind that found the worn places in his jacket and turned his fingers to ice.

Ugh! But it was deadly cold. Cold and lonely and heart-breaking to a boy of eleven. He was sorely tempted to crawl back to Mrs. Hawkins' boarding-house but he was ashamed. What would Mrs. Hawkins and her select boarders say at the sight of this ragged urchin come to claim their sympathy? Twice, before this gloomiest of days, Billy had visited The Star Store. He had been roughly ordered out the second time, for he was ragged and unkempt, quite unfit to touch elbows with the customers who rustled up and down the aisles. But Billy was in The Star long enough to discover that his mother was not at the hosiery counter.

What he would have done had he seen her there, it is hard to tell. Possibly he would have gone to her and begged her

forgiveness for running away. Perhaps he would have been overcome with self-consciousness, and would have again run away to fight against strong odds for a living.

Bitterness of spirit took possession of him after he was ordered from The Star. He felt that the world was against him. He felt abused, misunderstood, discouraged. Still he went on waging his battle, grimly, with belief in himself never quite dead. The darkest day came on Friday, when he crawled hungry and half frozen into his bed of leaves long before his bedtime hour, only to lie awake until morning, shivering with cold and weak from hunger.

It was nearly nine o'clock when something unusual roused Billy from the stupor into which he had finally fallen. Stiffly he raised himself on his elbow and looked around. Some one had pulled back the rude shutter near the head of Billy's bed. The square window framed a big face, red and fiercely moustached.

“Hello there,” said the face, “what are you doing here?”

“Sleeping. What did you think?” replied Billy, his wits returning.

“Well, get out, and quick about it,” returned the face.

Billy had no intention of getting out. He believed that the place belonged to him, or that it belonged to him until the tall boy came back to claim his partnership in it. This had been the thought that had kept him from breaking down completely, — the thought that inside the high gray fence he had a home of his very own.

“Get out,” said the face, “or I’ll come around there and pull you out.”

“I’d like to see you dare,” said Billy.
“I’d just like to see you.”

The next moment the door was pulled violently open, and a burly form in a blue suit and helmet thrust itself partially inside.

It must be confessed that Billy was frightened. Even a hero may be excused

for feeling some small amount of fear when the arm of the law threatens him.

“ Oh,” gasped Billy, getting up. “ I didn’t know who you were.”

“ Get out here where I can look at you, or you’ll find out who I am,” said the officer, backing out of the box, as Billy pulled himself from his bed, shook the leaves from his clothes and walked stiffly into the yard.

“ I wasn’t doing any harm sir. It’s my own place and I was just sleeping,” explained Billy meekly.

“ You were trespassing, you young limb. Trespassing. Can’t you read?” and he pointed at the signs stuck up here and there.

“ Yes sir, I can read,” replied Billy, squaring himself. “ But the owner let me have the use of this box and the yard while he was away.”

“ The owner?” For an instant the officer stopped to think. Then triumphantly, — “ What’s the owner’s name?”

Billy hesitated. Why, he wondered, had he neglected to ask the tall boy his name!

“Why — why I never asked his name.”

“Fine story. Well, get out, or I’ll have you up for trespassing and the Lord knows what else.” The officer spoke with a brogue. “I’ve a notion to have you up before his honour, on general principles. You’ve lied to me, anyway. The owner of this place is Mr. Harkness, a man who never speaks to the likes of a limb like you. I know him well myself, and a finer gentleman never lived.”

Billy stood dismayed. Then after all, the tall boy had no claims on the place, unless indeed he was Mr. Harkness. The thought seemed improbable, but there was some slight hope in it for Billy.

“Where does Mr. Harkness live?” he asked, meekly enough to please even the bullying policeman.

“I can’t tell you that, but many a time have I passed his office on Water Street.

If you know him so well, funny you don't know his name and his office, ain't it? "

Billy did not answer. The little remnant of courage that he still had was oozing away. It seemed that even this poor shelter from the cold was to be taken from him. Oh, it was truly a hard thing to be a boy with the whole big world against one.

The officer watched him. He was one of those men who, ready to toady to power, enjoy bullying weakness. But there was something about Billy, pinched and blue and unkempt as he was, that hinted power. He stood so squarely facing the burly brute who represented the law, and there was such a straightforward look in his gray eyes, that the officer was impressed in spite of himself. This boy was no ordinary tramp. That was evident.

"How long have you been hanging out here? "

"Ever since summer," answered Billy. "I came here with a friend who said the place belonged to him. We were partners.

But he went away with my money and left me the place. That's why I stayed."

"I think you'd better go to the station house with me, just on general principles."

"Oh no!" remonstrated Billy. "Give me a show. My things are all in there, — my tools and things. I'll get out, right off. Surely I will; but let me find another place first. Play fair. I haven't hurt anything; honest I haven't and I'll get out tonight. Just let me leave my things until tonight. I'll see Mr. Harkness, and if he isn't the fellow who gave me the permit to stay here, I'll get out. Isn't that fair?"

The officer thought for a moment and decided to be generous.

"All right. I'll let you off this time, but no more trespassing, you understand. Come now."

"I usually lock up first."

The officer grunted. "All right, lock up," he said curiously.

Billy went to the door, and raising a leather flap turned a rusty iron key in a

lock that he had found in the city dump hills. The officer grinned.

“ Why don’t you lock up at night? ”

“ Always expecting my friend to come back,” answered Billy, truthfully enough.

“ Never afraid? ”

Billy shook his head. “ Excepting when I’m all-fired hungry.”

They walked around by the excavation and then crawled through the hole in the fence.

“ That ought to be boarded up. I’ve been having three months furlough and they put Sullivan on the beat. Things have been going to the dogs, that’s plain. I’ll report this break to Mr. Harkness at once,” he went on musingly. “ And I’ll tell him to come down and look at your hangout.”

Billy did not reply. He was thinking.

He bade the officer goodbye at the corner and walked wearily toward the railroad station where, after hanging around for an hour, he earned a dime and bought a scanty breakfast. Then, feeling refreshed,

he walked away in the direction of the bridge. He crossed to the great city, for once oblivious of the throngs of men and women who surged against him. He walked on and on, thinking rapidly, making plans and rejecting them, but brightening as the sun crept up.

He would see Mr. Harkness. Upon that point he was decided. He would discover whether or not he and the tall boy were the same. If they were, he would make him explain a few things. If Mr. Harkness and the tall boy were not the same — Billy never got farther than the supposition. They must be the same, he thought cheerily. For when one is eleven and has breakfasted, however scantily, when the sun is warmer than it has been for days and the air is like wine, it is easy to have faith. At Water Street he paused. The dingy red and gray buildings looked respectable and forbidding. Could it be that the tall boy worked in one of these! In which one was he to find him? He was about to ask

a man who seemed to have more time than most of the passers-by, when his eye caught a sign painted on one of the window panes.

“Harkness and Harkness, Contractors.” the sign read.

It seemed most unlikely that the tall boy could be one of these Harknesses. Still he might be a relative.

Billy entered the building and going to the elevator asked to be taken to Mr. Harkness' office. The elevator man glanced in momentary surprise at the ragged urchin who made his request with the air of a man of the world. But many strange messengers come and go in the great office buildings of a city, so in a few minutes the elevator shot skywards, and after several stops the man called “Harkness and Harkness, Number 609, third door on your left.”

Billy stood for a moment in the tiled hall, staring about him. It seemed to him more and more unlikely that the tall boy belonged here. Still he would ask.

He walked to the third door on his left and knocked, somewhat timidly, it must be acknowledged.

Somebody called "Come in," and Billy turned the knob and entered. He found himself in a large room, facing a high desk or counter. Three young men on stools were working behind this counter, writing. At small desks, scattered about the room, four or five fresh-faced girls were clicking away like mad on typewriters. The tall boy was nowhere to be seen.

"Is Mr. Harkness in?" asked Billy mustering his courage.

"I don't know," replied one of the young men evasively. "What is your business with him?"

"I'm a friend," answered Billy.

"What name shall I say?" asked the young man, his face twitching.

Billy clenched his fists. He wanted to fight the young man who was obviously laughing at him because he wore ragged clothes. He longed to get out into the

streets among his kind, and yet there was a soreness inside him at the thought that he must look for his kind among the beggars and the children of the slums.

“ My name is Billy Lewis, and I want to see Mr. Harkness on private business,” Billy continued, making a brave show of courage. “ If he is here, will you tell him I am waiting.”

The young man rapped at a door marked “ Private ” and presently disappeared on the other side. Coming back after a moment, he opened a little door in the high counter and came outside.

“ Mr. Harkness says for you to tell me your business. He is busy.”

Billy hesitated. He did not like the young man with the merry blue eyes.

“ I can wait for Mr. Harkness, until he isn't busy,” said Billy.

“ But he is always busy. He sees people only on the most important matters. I'm his secretary.”

The word “ secretary ” sounded very

forbidding to Billy but he put on a brave front.

“It’s about the empty lot. I’ve been living there. A boy who said he was the owner gave me a partnership and I’ve fixed up the place. And now, — and now, they say I’ll have to move.”

Just then the door that said “Private,” opened and a rather short, broad-shouldered young man in an easy-fitting dark blue suit came out. He didn’t look half as rich or important as the young men who sat at the desks, so that Billy was very much surprised when he called out, “Has the boy gone, Jenkins?” to hear the young man he was questioning, answer, “No, Mr. Harkness, here he is.”

“Send him in,” the young man in blue called back, and the next moment Billy had walked through the door marked “Private” and was seated in a roomy leather chair, feeling comfortable and very much at home. Before a big desk in a revolving chair sat the young man in the blue serge

suit, and perched on the wide window-sill, smiling pleasantly at him, was a little girl with a chubby pink face. Her fair hair was parted in the middle and done in two smooth braids that hung to her waist.

"It's a great day, isn't it?" said Mr. Harkness and Billy liked him at once. He spoke as one man speaks to another, not as a man usually speaks to a small boy. And because Mr. Harkness understood small boys and knew how to speak to them, Billy forgot that he was dirty and ragged and homeless. He felt quite dignified and grown up.

"Great," replied Billy grinning, and showing a row of square white teeth.

"This is my sister. You don't mind her staying while you tell me your business, do you?"

Billy did not mind. In fact he felt rather superior to small girls with long braids of hair.

"You said you were a friend," continued Mr. Harkness in his nice way. "I've a

vile memory. Somehow I'm unable to place you."

"I made a mistake," said Billy frankly. "I thought you were the tall boy who took me to the lot and said we'd be partners. He said it was his estate and I've been living there ever since in a sort of shack I've fixed up on the lot."

"What lot?" queried Mr. Harkness.

"That lot in Oxbridge. There's a cellar dug. The tall boy said it was his and we were going to be partners."

Mr. Harkness laughed pleasantly. I wish some tall boy did own it," he said. "It's a pretty expensive piece of property. Dad and I are trying to give it away."

Billy didn't understand how an unused lot could be expensive, but he did not doubt Mr. Harkness. "I've been living there," he said. "This morning the cop told me to get out. He said you owned the lot, and that I was trespassing. I thought I'd see you about it."

"You did quite right," said Mr. Hark-

ness approvingly. "Now tell me everything. Who you are and how you happened to go there, and what and who the tall boy is."

So Billy began. He told him briefly of his mother and Mrs. Hawkins; how he had started to run away to California but had met the tall boy who had taken him to the empty lot and had disappeared with his money. Of his life since the tall boy had gone Billy made scant mention, but Mr. Harkness seemed to understand everything, and best of all he didn't seem to disapprove. He asked Billy for his mother's address but Billy was not sure. He thought the sanitarium was in a place called Wareham. Mr. Harkness said he'd find out and touched a button on the wall. In a moment a boy about Billy's age opened the door and Mr. Harkness asked him to find out if there was a sanitarium in Wareham and, if there were, to get him a connection. By and by the boy came back and said he had the connection. Then Mr. Harkness went out and

was gone for several minutes, leaving Billy and the pleasant-faced little girl alone.

“It’s all right,” he said when he came back, though he looked very serious. Then he asked Billy about his father. But it was very little Billy knew about his father, excepting that he came from London, England, Billy thought; that he had been an architect and that his name was John Lewis. Mr. Harkness wrote the name on a piece of paper but when he asked Billy if his father had had an office in Boston, Billy could not tell him, nor the names of his father’s friends or relatives. Mr. Harkness leaned his elbow on the desk and with his head resting against his palm, studied the few words he had written in the little notebook. Presently he looked up brightly. “It’ll be all right,” he said. “I can fill in the data. But now for the lease. You say you’ve put up a shack?”

Billy explained about the hogshead and the packing box. Mr. Harkness nodded.

“Now I’ll tell you what I’m going to do.

I'm going to give you a two years' lease on the property with the use of whatever lumber and brick there may be there. You go right on living there, and if it gets so cold you can't stand it or if you go stony broke write to me in care of this address. In the meantime I'll make you a loan of ten dollars. Get some clothes with it, then go around to the United News Company with a letter I'm going to give you, and go to selling papers. More than one good citizen has started life as a newsboy. Keep your self-repect, don't mix with riffraff or loafers, read all you can, and live like a human being. I suppose I ought to pack you off to your great-uncle, but hang it, I like your grit, and I'm going to look up your affairs while I'm in England next month. Now for the lease."

Billy watched the young man as he took an official looking piece of paper from his desk and filled out the blank spaces on it with writing. "Take that home with you and show it to the cop. It'll settle him for

some time, I guess. Now here's the loan. Don't spend it for nonsense. Buy a decent outfit and go into business."

He reached out and took Billy's hand, and Billy, looking into the ruddy young face, could find no words in which to express his thanks. But Mr. Harkness understood.

"Do you know," he said, "I like you, Billy. I thought you might be stringing me at first, but I've proved up a part of your story."

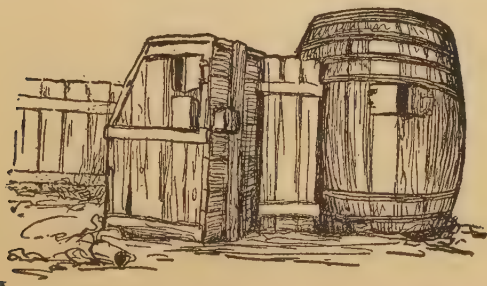
Billy cleared his throat. "You mean you found out about mother? Is she up there yet?"

"Yes. I'll tell you all about it when I get back. Don't worry about her, but come around in March and if you find you can't pull through the winter, just send me word through the address I gave you. Good-bye."

Billy grasped the young man's hand. "Goodbye," he said, then looking at the little girl he bowed with an ingenuous

politeness, " Goodbye, Miss Harkness," he said soberly, holding his cap in his hand until he was outside the door; " Goodbye, sir."

He barely saw the clerks and the typewriters as he hurried out of the office. He was to wear decent clothes once more; he was to have a good dinner and a business. Beside that, he had a signed lease for the use of the empty lot in Oxbridge. Billy felt that this was the happiest day of his life.



CHAPTER VIII

BILLY DISCOVERS THE PRINCESS



HELP me out, Billy, I'm stuck!"

Billy stopped, whirled round and glared at the pleading face upturned to his.

"Oh, go on. You're always stuck."

"Just this once, Billy."

The thin little face with its Semitic nose and mouth, showed no traces of fear. Billy scowled fiercely, then laughed. He took the papers which the small boy carried under one arm, and in a harsh voice that could be heard the length and breadth of the Common, called out the news that had thrilled the city an hour before. "Five o'clock Clarion. All about the terrible railroad accident on the Big Four. Late edition. Twelve lives lost. Evening Clarion!"

There were a dozen papers to be sold, but Billy had the height, the voice, the convincing daring that compel. In five minutes he had sold the papers and was swinging down the street with that swagger common to street boys and college men. From the tiny checked cap, that stuck like a postage stamp to the back of his head, to his sturdy calfskin shoes, Billy pictured the lively, alert, successful boy of the streets. There was about him but a faint resemblance to the trusting and rather delicate youngster, who, fourteen months ago, with hate and sorrow in his sore little heart, had run away from Mrs. Hawkins' boarding-house to seek his fortune. He had grown taller, broader, browner. The tanned and sunburned skin made his eyes seem wider and a lighter gray than they had two years ago. Many fathers pay hundreds of dollars to secure for their sons a certain air and bearing which Billy had picked up in the streets. He was a cosmopolitan. Not the cosmo-

politan of the social world but a cosmopolitan of the slums. Between the two, after all, there is but a surface difference, a mere difference in the matter of finish and polish.

Hurrying down the crowded street, he was greeted again and again with a cheery, "Hello, Billy," or "Hello, Bill," by seedy-looking boys and men, for among his kind he was not without popularity. Perhaps, now and then, he caught the keen eye of some man or woman of that other world to which he no longer belonged, as it flashed him a glance of swift admiration. For about him there was that strength which attracts wherever found.

Turning a corner that led to the boulevard, Billy's eye caught sight of an old woman huddled against the wall and shivering in spite of her shawl. Billy tossed her a nickel. "Go and get your hot drink and stop shaking." His voice was hard and he chuckled to himself at the "God

bless you, Billy, but you're the real gentleman," that she sent cackling after him.

He hurried along, bending slightly forward from the hips as he walked, with his hands thrust lightly into his pockets where he rattled the coins with a sense of satisfaction and well-being. On and on he went, lunging before street cars, ploughing his way roughly through dense throngs of men and women waiting impatiently for the cars that were to take them home, jabbing with his elbows and his shoulders, and in danger of losing his life half a hundred times among the horses, cars and automobiles that thronged the streets.

Many of the newsboys were still rushing about, madly calling their papers, and Billy smiled grimly to himself as he jingled the coins in his pocket.

"Got to give 'em a show," he muttered. "It's too easy running them out of business. What's the use?"

He had almost reached the bridge that joined the great city where he now did

business, with the smaller town where he camped happily in the unused packing box, when he noticed a girl with a bundle of papers under her arm trying to make herself heard above the jangle of car bells and the rush of horses and wagons. She was small and dark, with short reddish curls that clung in rings to her head. Her eyes were a golden brown with long lashes and straight, finely cut, black brows. Her face was delicately oval and about her whole figure there was something that scintillated and gleamed as she dashed lightly here and there holding up her wares to the indifferent throngs. She was ragged and barefooted, and in spite of the lithe grace of her small figure she looked half starved. She might have been eight years old, she might have been ten.

Billy watched her, smiling to himself at her unusual business methods. She seemed to demand business, not beg for it as the ordinary news boy and girl do. She presented her wares with a challenge, but she

was too far from the centre of things to do a good business, even had she not seemed to work under violent internal protest. After challenging a customer and getting no attention, she would stamp her bare foot on the pavement and scowl at the hurrying passers-by. Then, after an intermission of a minute or two, she would rush up to somebody and stopping directly in front of him, fairly snap her wares under his nose. But the throngs began to thin, and the girl still carried a large bunch of unsold papers. Nevertheless, she did not proceed regularly in presenting them. She continued to do her work spasmodically, shaking her head and stamping her little feet. It seemed to infuriate her beyond expression when a man or woman passed her unheeded, as men and women have the habit of doing when approached by the gamin of the street. She seemed to resent indifference even more than she did the curt refusals which met her, now and then.

By and by, with a dozen or more papers

still unsold, she threw herself down on the curb stone in what seemed to be a frenzy of anger. Crossing the street Billy approached her, but being unaccustomed to girls, was at a loss how to address her. Finally he walked up and stood directly in front of her. She glanced at him angrily, her short upper lip curling away from her teeth, looked him over from head to toe, buried her chin in her palm and stared moodily past him as if he were of no more importance than the telephone pole against which he leaned. Billy moistened his lips and attempted to say something. The child looked up, superciliously, shrugged her shoulders and in a voice with a strongly marked foreign accent, said slowly, "You're in my way. Please to go on." Then she went on staring beyond him as if for her he did not exist.

Billy mustered his courage. "Say, little girl, let me sell you out."

The child did not answer, and Billy made a second attempt.

“ Let me help you out, will you Sis? ”

The girl looked up scornfully. “ My name is Hortense.”

She pronounced the “ e ” like “ aw,” letting the sound come through her nose. It pleased Billy’s ear.

“ All right, Hortense. Give me your papers.”

She held out the papers without looking up. “ You zem desire to sell? It is vaire well. I shall not try to sell zem any more. I hate it. Zay can kill me if zay will, but I will nevaire, *nevaire*, NEVAIRE, try any more.”

Billy took the papers, and by dint of much persistency and hard work, disposed of them in half an hour. Returning to where the girl waited indifferently for him he gave her the proceeds from the stock. “ Now go home and eat supper. You’ll feel better after that,” he said.

“ I am not going home again, nevaire. I will it have to do again tomorrow and I will not, nevaire. I will first die.”

Billy looked at her in amazement. "Why do you have to do it when you hate it so?"

"Why?" The child laughed. The sound was like the cackling laugh of a very old woman. "Because we are poor. Did you zink I did it for ze amusement? I haf zis been doing for four days, now, and it is ze last time, ze vaire last. I not care what zay do to me."

"Got a father and mother?"

"Ah, ze mama! Yes, I haf one mama." She laughed again, the bitter cackling laugh of age. "Oh, yes, I haf ze mama. My papa has married her and now zee is my muzzer and I must call her mama. Is it not true? Oh, but zee is ugly."

"You mean she is your stepmother?"

"Certainement." This with infinite disgust. "When your papa marries once more it is your stepmuzzer, — is it not, — zat dame? And you must call her mama — is it not true? Even when your poor papa is no more. You must live with zat woman and call her mama?"

Billy nodded. "Well you must run home now; maybe I can help you tomorrow. It'll be all right tonight, for you have sold out."

"But I am not going home! Not to zat place. I am going to France. It is not nice here. I go back to France." Then brightening suddenly, she exclaimed, "Would you see ze picture of ze first mama? It is here. She was *vaire* beautiful — like one princess."

She held up an old silver locket that she wore around her neck, suspended from a soiled ribbon. "Zis is my first mama. Beautiful is it not?"

Truly the face that looked up at Billy from the faded photograph in the locket, was beautiful.

"And oh, my stepmuzzer, — ze ugly dame, zat makes me work. Ugh, I am *nevaire* going back."

Suddenly an inspiration came to Billy. "Come home with me, Hortense. I have a house all my own. You shall live in it all

day long and I will bring home the money to you at night. You will learn English and by and by, sometime, you shall have beautiful dresses and I will work, and make the money and wait on you."

"You will be my servant? Is it not so?" cried the child, brightly.

Billy smiled. Truly this little girl was a strange creature.

"Yes, if you want a servant."

"And you will wait on me? Is zat true?"

Billy laughed. "You're a bully sort of a girl."

The child looked up. "You mean zat I am beautiful?"

"I guess so. Anything you want me to mean. Come along."

"But I am dirty. I haf no shoes. Is it not zat I must buy ze shoes?"

"Oh, come on. I live all alone. It's an estate," and Billy chuckled as he repeated the words of the tall boy, "and left to me."

"Oh," sighed the girl ecstatically.

“ And tomorrow you will buy me ze new dress and ze shoes and ze stockings, and I shall be ze grand lady, a *princess* maybe? ”

“ Anything you want to be. To me you’re a circus, but if you like being a grand lady, you are it, I guess, *princess*. ”

They walked over the bridge and beyond for nearly two miles. Stopping at a corner store Billy bought milk which he carried in a paper pail, apples, brown bread and a little pan of pork and beans. The purchases took the greater portion of his earnings but his spirits were high in spite of that.

“ Dining at home this evening, ” he said with a grin, to the rosy Irish woman who kept the store. And then with an assumption of elegance, he pursed his lips, raised his eyebrows and repeated what he had heard on a street corner earlier in the day. “ There’s *such* a sameness about hotel cooking. ”

The woman behind the counter shook with laughter. “ Ye’ll be the death of me,

Billy." Then she nodded towards the little girl. "Who's the pretty child there?"

"Company of mine. She's going to visit down at my place for a few days."

"Some relation?" demanded the woman. "She looks like an Eyetalian."

"Just a friend," replied Billy turning to leave the store.

The woman watched the two children until they had passed from sight. Not that she found anything strange in their appearance, for the girl might have belonged to any one of the many foreign families that thronged the neighbourhood, and she was accustomed to Billy, who had been doing business at the little store for several months. She was simply amused and business was dull.



CHAPTER IX

BILLY ADOPTS THE PRINCESS



THE children walked on for nearly a mile, Billy explaining to his small companion the points of interest in the neighbourhood. At last they reached the gray board fence and Billy led Hortense to the place where the board was missing. But the little girl hesitated when Billy told her to crawl through the fence into the lot.

“Is zis an estate?” she questioned wonderingly.

“This is my estate. Crawl through, princess.”

The child crawled through the opening and waited for Billy, then followed him as he picked his way through the empty cans and rubbish that had accumulated in spite

of numerous sign boards forbidding dumping on the grounds.

Stopping in front of his strangely built house, he took the great rusty key from his pocket and inserting it in the lock threw open the door.

During the fourteen months that had passed, many improvements had been made in the little house. The door between the hogshead and the packing box had been enlarged, giving a more spacious air to the interior. A few boards were arranged to form a sort of casing for the rough edges where the two rooms joined, doing the double duty of finishing the doorway neatly and of keeping out draughts.

There were more shelves fastened to one side of the packing box, now. On these were arranged a few books and a great many newspapers and posters. Everywhere about the place there were pictures of houses — interiors, exteriors, and plans. These were taken from the illustrated sections of the daily papers and showed the

trend of Billy's mind. On a tiny stand of rough wood at one end of the packing box stood a miniature cottage, complete even to its tiny piazza and window shutters. This was Billy's pride. He had made it by lamplight after his work in the city was over, measuring, trimming and fitting the parts together until it was perfect in every detail.

In the larger room, Billy had taken away the bed of leaves, and had made a rude cot. This cot consisted of four uprights and two cross beams to which he had tacked a piece of sail cloth. A red blanket served alternately as coverlet and rug. In this part of Billy's dwelling there was a strange assortment of old china, books and pictures. There was also a broken mirror in a weather-beaten frame and a pair of antique opera glasses.

The little girl looked about her in amazement. Even to her, accustomed to the poverty-haunted dwelling-places of the slums, this low-ceiled place in which Billy

could barely stand upright, seemed squalidly poor and forbidding. But Billy did not notice her perturbation.

“Now for a little fresh air, a glimpse of the ell, and then supper,” he exclaimed, opening three small holes in the side of the piano box and half a dozen cut in the hog'shead. This done he carefully removed a few staves from one end of the hog'shead.

“Place's a trifle small for two, you will notice, princess, but it's cosy and the ell is going to be great. I'll sleep in there to-night on the floor and you can make yourself at home in the main building,” and he waved his hand to indicate that she was to have the use of the round room in which they stood, together with the packing box addition. “Come in and see the ell. It'll be a peach when it's done.”

He led her through the opening that he had made by taking out the staves and she found herself in a roomy shed. The joists and beams were in place and the sides

boarded up. The roof but half covered the shed as yet and there was no glass in the large opening which would eventually be a window. "I'll have this done by winter with a stove and everything in it. It's the li-ber-ary," announced Billy proudly. "Mr. Harkness gave me a long lease to these grounds, princess, and the right to build as much as I chose on them. I'll show you the lease. It's tacked up in the main building. But I guess we'll have supper now."

Going back into what Billy called the main building, the little girl watched him while he worked over the supper, yielding in spite of herself to the fascination of what seemed to be endless cupboards, — boxes which Billy had tacked to the outside of the packing box and which opened into it by means of rudely constructed sliding doors. There was the provision cupboard with many shelves on which he kept bread and jam and the left-overs from the day before. Then there was

another cupboard with two shelves. Of these, the upper was covered with oilcloth and on it was a new, two-burner, kerosene stove. Below the shelf hung pots and pans, some new, some evidently the result of search in the dump yards. Another cupboard was filled with bits of broken china and glass and in another was kept Billy's hammer, wrench, saw, and a great many tins full of rusty nails.

Taking his wrench, Billy went to the hydrant and drew some water, leaving the little girl to explore the mysteries of the numerous cupboards. Returning he found her before the box full of broken china. She was holding a blue plate with a large triangular break in it.

"Don't you think that's pretty, princess?" Billy said taking it from her. "I found it in the yard early one morning and although it's smashed worse than some that I've got, I like it because it's such a pretty colour. Doesn't it look deep and cool?"

“It is blue, zat is all; and it is vaire broken,” replied the girl.

Billy turned away disappointed, to light his oil stove, talking cheerily meantime to the little girl.

“There aren’t many houses set right down in a gold field are there, princess?” said he. “Most everything I have came out of the yard. What other people don’t want you know. There’s nothing like having a chance to look over the things people throw away. I find something new almost every day. Just try these opera glasses. Aren’t they great?”

The princess examined the glasses which were without lenses, carefully, but it was evident to Billy that she didn’t know what they were for.

“You look through them. See!” said Billy, illustrating his remark. “All the big swells at the theatre have them and look at the actors and actresses. I’ll let you have them when we go to the play,

princess. Gee! but the kids will stare when you put them against your eyes."

The little girl had suddenly become interested. "Do ze rich folks look wiz zem?" she asked eagerly.

"Of course they do."

"I nevaire saw zem."

"Oh, at the plays, you know. Ever seen a play?" The child shook her head.

"We'll go tomorrow night. You can take the opera glasses. Everyone will think we're swells."

"I can not go," replied the princess, moodily.

"Why not?"

"Oh, I can not." Her face had clouded.

"I haf not ze clothes."

"I'll buy you some, princess. I've got money." He lifted one of the boards in the floor and took out a sardine box. It was full of silver. "See? I've saved that and I guess you can have it for some clothes. You see, princess, I've adopted you."

“ Can I haf ze shoes? ” demanded the princess.

“ Yes,” replied Billy.

“ And one dress? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And one hat with ze red ribbons, can I haf? ”

“ I guess so. I don’t think it’ll cost as much as this box full of money. I’ve saved all that since winter to — to — buy a stove,” continued Billy reluctantly. “ Gee, but it was cold last winter.”

But the princess was unheeding. “ And will you buy me ze kid gloves, like ze little girl I saw? ”

“ Sure,” replied Billy, rich in promises. “ Sure. Whatever you want. Aren’t you a princess? ”

The little girl looked pleased. “ I am happy zat I come to live wiz you,” she said musingly. “ You are ze good boy. I like vaire much that name, princess.”

Billy glowed. He had warmed the little pan of pork and beans and had put them,

with the brown bread, the apples and the milk, on the table which he had covered with a piece of oilcloth and the broken china.

He stood looking down at it with infinite satisfaction. He had modelled his light housekeeping after that much admired light housekeeping of Madam Zeus, the fortune teller, but this was the first time he had entertained a guest at his board. He pushed up the bench and the princess sat down. Billy ate his supper standing.



CHAPTER X

BILLY AND THE PRINCESS SEE AN OPERA



H! the wonderful night!

There was the princess in a bright red dress with a patent leather belt that was run through little straps of the red cloth and hung loosely in the prettiest kind of a fashion about her hips. A soft tam-o'-shanter perched jauntily on her dark curls and her long thin legs were encased in a brand new pair of black stockings without a hole or a break in them. She limped a very little when she walked because the new shoes were a trifle small, but they were so bright and shining that the princess did not mind the pain. She carried the opera glasses proudly, holding them against her chest so that everybody could see them. As for Billy, he had brushed

his clothes until they looked very respectable and he wore a new shirt and new shoes and stockings.

They sat in the front row of the family circle in the middle seats and took turns with the opera glasses. It was only a cheap, little comic opera in a poor, gaudy little theatre in a most unfashionable part of the great city, but to them it was heaven. The lights and the tawdry tapestries, the women in their gay silk blouses and the men with their freshly shaved faces and clean linen, all belonged to that beautiful world of fashion that the Sunday papers pictured in glowing colours.

Billy and the princess started early, — before dark, in fact, for it was a long walk and they were forced to rest frequently on account of the tight shoes. However, in spite of the many halts on the way they were almost the first ones in the family circle and there was a delicious half hour of waiting while charmed throngs came in and took their seats.

At last the curtain went up on a stage filled with beautiful, fairy-like creatures in the most gorgeous gowns. The princess held her breath. Never had she dreamed of anything like this. She winked her eyes and stared very hard to be sure that she was awake; then she remembered herself. A woman in one of the stage boxes was looking at the chorus through her opera glasses. The princess raised her own and gazed long at the stage.

Presently, after the first excitement was over, she realized that there was singing. The words were indistinguishable but the music swept up to them in waves of wonderful sound. She fairly held her breath, fearing that it would stop, and more than one man and woman who caught a glimpse of that rapt little face forgot the stage to watch the child.

"This is only the start. It's not a marker to what's coming," whispered Billy, proud in his knowledge.

But the princess nudged him to keep

quiet while she watched and listened breathlessly.

By and by the singing stopped and two painted clowns tumbled upon the stage. The princess gasped and leaned back in her seat.

"Aren't they great?" whispered Billy. "Look, princess."

The princess glanced at the stage and shrugged her shoulders. "Zey're not nice," she said. Then she raised her glasses and swept the audience, levelling them finally upon the stage box.

"Don't ze opera glasses make every-zing wonderful? I don't see how anybody can see a zing who haf not of ze opera glasses."

The princess whispered so loudly that the woman who sat beside Billy craned her neck to see.

"May I take your glasses for a moment, little girl?" she asked curiously.

"Certainly," answered the princess, very proud to have been noticed. The

woman, who had never before looked through a pair of glasses, raised them awkwardly to her eyes.

“They certainly do make things look prettier,” she said.

“Don’t they!” volunteered Billy. “We can’t see a thing without them.”

The woman offered the glasses to her escort who took them gingerly, and after a hurried glance returned them to his partner.

“Thank you ever so much,” whispered the woman. “It’s the first time I ever looked through an opera glass.”

“You’re perfectly welcome to them whenever you want to see through them,” said Billy elaborately, as he gave the glasses to the princess and then sat up very straight in his opera chair, feeling himself of unusual importance.

At this moment the scene changed to show a field of enormous poppies, with delicate silken petals swaying as if swept by a gentle wind. Then, suddenly, a most

wonderful thing happened. From the heart of every poppy rose a head and shoulders, and as if by a miracle, every poppy became a girl and every girl was real, for each one began immediately to dance and whirl and swing and the next moment, into the midst of this field of girls there swept a tiny white automobile with a baby boy in a white uniform at the wheel and quite the loveliest creature ever seen for a passenger. Before Billy or the princess could get their breath, the lovely creature, that turned out to be a girl in a huge white hat and a dress that looked exactly like a great double rose had sprung to the ground and had run down to the very footlights. Leaning over them, she smiled into the upturned faces of the audience and sang a cunning little song about two birds that built a nest, in the thinnest, sweetest, most bird-like little voice that one could imagine. Billy watched her as she skipped here and there like a lovely white butterfly in a field of

blossoms, but the princess leaned back in her seat with her eyes fixed moodily upon the stage. By and by when the girl had stopped singing and disappeared, there was a tremendous storm of hand-clapping and she finally came back, bowing and smiling and sang the song all over again. Then again there was a great clapping of hands and in the family circle, whistles and the stamp of feet, and a third time the girl came out and sang the song. And still the princess sat scowling and unmoved. Finally, when the house was quiet and the opera was permitted to continue, the princess touched Billy's arm.

“Why did zay make such a noise and clap zaire hands, Billy?” she asked.

“Because they like it. That's Adele Adair. Her picture was in the paper last night. It wasn't half as pretty as she is, though. Isn't she a perfect queen?”

But the princess did not reply. The opera glasses remained forgotten in her

lap for the rest of the evening. She was thinking moodily.

At last it was over, and Billy and the princess, having lingered outside the theatre until the last of the few carriages had driven away, started on their long homeward journey. Billy, carried away by the events of the evening, talked excitedly, reviewing the opera and continually asking the princess if she remembered this thing or that. For some time he failed to notice that the princess walked quietly beside him, heavily and without spirit. Finally she interrupted Billy.

“Does it not make you feel seek, right here?” she asked, laying one hand on her chest. “I don’t feel happy, Billy. Is it because my dress is not pretty and I haf not of ze gloves?”

Billy stopped and looked at her aghast. “Your dress is beautiful, princess. Nobody there looked as nice as you.”

The princess rubbed the sole of her foot on the pavement.

“Honest, princess, you’re a corker. Didn’t you see everybody looking at you?”

The princess kept her eyes moodily on the ground. “I hate being alive. I hate it. I wish I could be zat tree. Zen I would not haf to wish and wish, and feel so seek in here.”

“Didn’t you have a good time, princess?” questioned Billy in a hurt voice. “If you didn’t you needn’t go again. Never!”

“I want to go. I want to go every night. I want to see zat girl; I want to Billy.”

“Who do you want to see?”

“Zat girl who sang of ze birds. I want to see her. Zat Adele Adair. I want to see zem all, Billy!”

Billy, lacking in the understanding of the woman child, blundered stupidly.

“They were pretty, all right. And Miss Adair can sing can’t she?”

Then the princess did a most astounding thing. She threw the wonderful opera glasses as far as she could and turning upon

Billy in a fury cried, "No she was not pretty and she can not sing any better — any better zan a cat. So zere!"

"Oh," said Billy. He picked up the opera glasses and putting them in his pocket, took the princess by the arm. This time he blundered to advantage and learned a lesson which he never forgot.

"I don't believe she can sing very much. I just said she could to please you and I've heard that her face isn't much when it isn't covered with paint and powder. She's old too. Twenty-five if she's a day."

The princess brightened. "Her red cheeks — zey are not — are not real?" she asked.

"Nope," replied Billy, wisely.

"And you zink she not sing vaire good?"

"Nope," replied Billy again, wisely.

"Billy, am I as pretty as zat Adele Adair, I mean when I haf a white dress and ze painted cheeks?"

"You're ten hundred, million, quadril-

lion times better looking. And you don't have to put on paint. You're all right. Just ask anyone." Oh! Billy of wonderful wisdom!

"I don't know ze pretty songs, Billy."

"You can learn some and sing 'em a hundred times better than she did."

"And, Billy, when I am big can I haf ze morning dress and ze afternoon dress and ze evening dress and — and — ze dinner dress and ze — ze — re-ception dress? Can I, do you zink Billy?"

"Sure."

"Like ze ladies zat we saw in ze Sunday Clarion?"

"Sure," said Billy, "only better."

"And Billy, which would you razzer do if you was me; sit in one of ze little balconies by ze stage in a stuffed chair with ze red velvet on it — or sing?"

"I don't know," replied Billy.

"Neizer do I," replied the princess. "I zink maybe it is more grand to sit in ze red velvet chair and nevaire look at ze

ozzer folks as if you could see zem, zan it is to sing and haf everybody slapping ze hands."

"Yes, I guess it is," replied Billy and this momentous question settled, the two children proceeded to their strange little house in the great black lot.



CHAPTER XI

BILLY PROMISES TO BUY A FUR TIPPET



IT was the middle of November before the ell was finished and ready for occupancy. On the outside it presented a strange appearance, constructed as it was from pieces of packing boxes, weather-beaten lumber and shingles; but it had a roof that did not leak, and there was a window with checkerboard panes and a real door with a doorstep. On one side it joined the hogshead which jutted out between the ell and the piano box like a small bay window. Billy was proud of his work and even the princess commended it.

Inside the ell was almost artistic, crude as it was. It was boarded up roughly, but defects in the boarding were covered with dark green builders' paper, that sheathed

the ceiling and the side walls. On the side opposite the window, Billy had built a long bench, and above this there were shelves running to the roof. These were designed for books, Billy told the princess. The princess had objected to this until Billy, old in wisdom, assured her that books were the chief furniture in the dwellings of the rich. Under the window there was another shelf, "for flowers," Billy told the princess, and this time she was silent. Probably rich people always had a shelf for flowers. In the middle of the room there was a homemade table, with huge legs sawed from the joists that Billy had found, its top covered with the building paper. As yet there was no carpet on the rough floor. This was one of the things to work and hope for. The princess longed to have a bureau in the room, but Billy compromised with her by substituting a packing case with shelves inside and hanging a new mirror above it.

After long discussions, it had been de-

cided that the hogshead should be turned over to the princess for a bed-room. A cot bed with a real mattress was put into it for the little girl, and the sail cloth bed turned over again to Billy, who had slept on the floor in the ell after the princess came.

Now the great thing was the stove. Every penny that Billy could save was being hoarded for this, and even the wheedling of the princess, who considered the stove a more or less useless extravagance, found Billy's purpose unshaken.

They were discussing the matter of the stove the night after the ell was finished, sitting side by side on the bench under the empty bookshelves.

"I've seen such a nice stove," said Billy, "with an oven."

"How much will it cost?" demanded the princess, drawing her dark brows together. She spoke now with barely a trace of the foreign accent.

"It's a secondhand stove at Rudolf

Epstein's. I can get it for three dollars and fifty cents and Rudolf says he will give me some zinc and a stovepipe."

"But I could get that nice fur for two dollars and fifty-nine cents, Billy, and fur's just as warm. You promised me the fur, you know you did."

Billy nodded. "When we are rich, I'll get you a fur that'll reach to the bottom of your dress, princess."

"But being rich is such a long time off."

"Not when I get to be an architect, princess," replied Billy. "I'm going to build you a house then that'll be great. Just look." Billy went to one of the cupboards in the other room and came back with a package of drawings. "This is the house. See the porch. Just the porch is as big, and bigger than this whole house altogether and it's got a railing all around except at the steps."

"Yes," said the princess, "and I'll sit on it with a white muslin dress on and

slippers — white slippers, Billy — and when little girls and boys go by — dirty little girls and boys — I'll just read in a book with a red cover and I won't see them at all, and I'll have icecream and candy all the time."

"Yes," said Billy absently, "and these windows will be of glass clear to the ground and they'll open in two parts like doors and there will be a great big, big, lib-er-ary with shelves of books all over it except where we have the brick fireplace. This is the way it'll be, princess, with the long windows that are doors and that open on the porch." The princess glanced casually at the designs which Billy had made.

"And you'll be my coachman, Billy, and wear long black boots and white breeches that fit just like everything, and a black coat. No, I'll have it a purple coat with buttons and a tall hat, wouldn't you, Billy?" interjected the princess. "You are going to be my coachman; you said you would be, you know."

Billy smiled. "But, princess, if I'm an architect I can't be a coachman."

"But you said you'd be and architects don't dress so nice, do they, Billy, or have such nice horses? I'd rather have you a coachman, and I'll ride in the carriage and lean back and carry a white parasol, — no, I think I'll carry a red parasol," said the princess.

"All right," said Billy. "But now look at the first floor plan. There are going to be four rooms on the first floor, princess, — a dining-room, where we sit only when we eat —."

"Oh, scissors!" squeaked a voice at the window. "Scissors!"

Billy leaped to his feet, the plans falling all about him. He rushed to the door and throwing it open ran out into the darkness. Hither and thither he hurried, shouting, "Hello! Where are you anyway?" but there was no answer, so at last he went back to the plans and the princess.

"What was it, Billy?" asked the prin-

cess, as he came in, closing and locking the door behind him. "What was it?"

"I thought I heard some one say, 'Scissors.'"

"I didn't," said the princess.

"Didn't you hear anything, princess?"

"Not a thing," replied the princess.

"Just a little noise, maybe a rat. Tell me some more about when we get rich, Billy."

"I was sure I heard him," said Billy musingly.

"Who?"

"Oh, some one I used to know."

"Then why did he run away, if you knew him?" asked the princess.

"Because he stole some money from me," said Billy; "we were going to be partners."

"Oh," said the princess. "But tell about being rich."

So Billy went on, forgetting the exclamation that had startled him in his enthusiasm over the house that was to be built

in the golden future, and neither of the children saw the dark form that stole up to the little house and stood peering in at them through the window.

“ Well,” said Billy at last, “ I’m sleepy and I want to do a lot tomorrow. I want to earn a dollar.”

The princess nodded. “ How much have you got now, Billy? ”

Billy pulled out a cunningly contrived secret drawer from beneath the table and taking out the sardine box, poured its contents on the table.

“ Three dollars. You can have the tippet in a day or two and we’ll have the stove, too, princess,” he said. Then he took up the little lamp, hooked the door and five minutes later the children were sleeping soundly.

The dark figure chuckled and slipped away into the night.

CHAPTER XII

THE ROBBERY



“**D**ID you make enough, Billy?” cried the princess from the corner near the end of the bridge where she waited every night for Billy’s return.

“Yes,” replied Billy, jingling the money in his pocket.

“Can I have the tippet tomorrow?” questioned the princess, eagerly.

“After we get the stove in,” replied Billy warily.

“But you said there was enough for both. Why don’t we get the tippet the very first thing?”

“Because the stores are closed. But we’ll get it the first thing in the morning, princess, for I’m going to get the stove tonight. Rudolf is going to keep open for

me until I come with the money. It's a fine stove." Then with a sudden change of subject: "Say, princess, I saw Adele Adair today. I stood right next to her."

"Did you Billy! Did she look nice?"

"Oh she had on a nice dress. It looked just like mourning. There wasn't a bit of trimming on it. It was awful tight and heavy looking and everybody stared and stared. Say princess, just as soon as we get the house I'm going to get you one of those black dresses that look like mourning and aren't. She had on a fur too, just like that one you want. I followed her and asked her to buy a paper. She said she didn't have any change but to come on with her. We went into a store, — not a very big store — not one half as big as The Star — and she bought two pairs of black stockings with roses on them and she gave the girl ten dollars. I saw it was ten. She said she wanted small change, — and four quarters came back in the little box — just four quarters out of the ten —

and she gave me one and said that was all right and took a paper. And say, princess, I guess those stockings had gold threads in them, because I felt so good I asked for some stockings, too, and the girl showed me some just as good, that were nineteen cents and I bought you a pair. Don't you think those others must have had gold threads in them that didn't show, for these look just the same." He took a small package from his pocket and gave it to the princess. She took it without a word.

"Look at them, princess. They're pretty, with little roses on them — pink roses."

The princess opened the package. "They are pretty, Billy," she said but her face was clouded.

"What's the matter, princess?"

"I want a black dress. It's always the same. When the other people wear black dresses I have red and then when they wear red, I have black. I'm tired of being poor."

“But we’re getting richer every day. We have a nice house, and princess, I know a boy who works in the theatre and he is going to ask if I can work there, too, and then there will be tickets for every single night.”

“Oh,” gasped the princess, pleased at last. “Now let us hurry, Billy, so you can get supper and then go after the stove. It will be nice to have a stove, Billy. Not as nice as the fur tippet, but nice.”

Supper finished and the scraps of china put away, the princess put on her tam-o'-shanter and the thin little coat that had come from a secondhand dealer and waited for Billy to get the money from the sardine box. Billy pulled out the drawer and took out the sardine box. It felt strangely light.

“Where’s the money princess?” he called. “The box is empty.”

The princess rushed into the ell like a whirlwind.

“The money’s there. I saw it today.

Three times today I counted it to be sure that with two more dollars we should have the stove and the tippet. It is there."

Billy held out the empty box. "It is gone, I tell you."

"Then you have hidden it."

"I haven't seen it. You must have put it away."

"I didn't," screamed the princess. "I didn't. You have it in your pocket. You don't want to buy me the tippet, but you shall." She sprang upon him like a wild-cat. "You shall. Give me the money. I don't want an old stove. I want the fur tippet, do you hear me?" She pinched and clawed at him while he tried to hold her hands.

He held her off as well as he could, but in spite of himself, she hurt him, using her feet, her hands, her teeth; biting, scratching and kicking. "Give me the money," she panted, "or I'll go away. Do you hear me? I'll go away and never, never come back. I will go on the stage and sing.

You said I could sing better than that girl, you said I could; and I'm prettier, you said so. And I will have the fur, I will. Give me the money."

At last he tore himself from her and she fell back on the floor, sobbing and moaning. It was terrible to hear her.

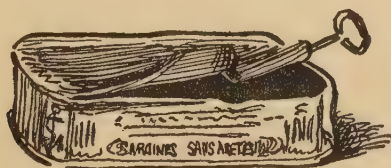
"Oh, you have killed me," she sobbed. "You have hurt me. I am going to run away. Oh, oh."

He wiped the blood from his face where her fingers had raked off a long furrow of skin and bending over the child, tried to reason with her, but she went on crying and moaning.

"The money's gone, princess, — stolen. It must have been the tall boy. I heard him and I'll get even with him for it. But it's gone princess and we can't help it. Get up now and don't cry. You can have the tippet next week. I'll work all day and I'll find something to do in the evening, too, princess. It'll be all right, honest and truly, it will. I've two dollars now, to

begin with. Get up or you'll take cold. It's cold here."

But the princess continued to sob as if her heart would break, and at last Billy threw the red blanket over her and went into the other room to think. By and by he heard the princess getting ready for bed. He called "good night" but there was no answer.



CHAPTER XIII

THE PRINCESS HAS AN ADVENTURE



IN the morning the princess was still sleeping when Billy crept off to work, resolved to make up in a day or two what he had lost and in the meantime, if possible to wreak vengeance on the tall boy.

After a time the princess opened her eyes and called, "Billy!" But Billy had gone. She got up and dressed slowly, putting on the red dress, no longer new, and clasping the worn belt around her waist. She put on the new stockings with the rosebuds and her shoes, now worn out at the toes and with one loosely flapping sole. She spread herself some bread and butter, ate it and walked thoughtfully to the corner. The sun was shining, the factories

busy, troops of boys and girls were hurrying by to school. She wondered what they did in school and was tempted to follow them, but they looked at her so strangely that she stopped at the corner. Billy had taught her to read a little, and had explained how everything one saw or thought could be made so that other people could see and think the same thing, by means of the little black letters. She had become interested in spite of herself, especially when Billy read to her the beautiful descriptions of balls and receptions, and of the wonderful gowns the women wore.

She stood on the corner, cherishing her grief and anger against Billy. She believed that Billy had hidden the money so that she could not have the fur tippet. Her anger rose and flushed her cheeks. From far up the street a carriage was coming, driven by a man in a high shiny hat. It was most unusual to see a carriage in this part of the town, and the princess watched it excitedly. It drew nearer. Now she

could almost touch it, and there in the back seat in a dress that looked like mourning, and a great hat with waving plumes framing her golden hair, was a lady, a hundred times prettier than Miss Adair, and as delicately coloured as a piece of porcelain.

The princess looked and gasped as she looked. And at that moment the lady's blue eyes met the princess's brown ones, and the owner of the blue eyes almost gasped, herself. Never had she seen a face so piquant, so charming, she thought.

The carriage rolled on down the street. The princess watched it for a block, two blocks, three. Then a wonderful thing happened. The carriage turned back, and driving straight up to where the princess stood, stopped. The princess was tempted to run away, but curiosity held her. She noticed now for the first time that a small, wizened man was seated beside the lady in black. She wondered if he could be her father.

After a moment, the golden-haired lady beckoned to the princess. "Come here, child," she said, and in spite of the trace of patronage in the voice, the princess obeyed. "What is your name?"

"Hortense, — Hortense St. Cyr," said the princess.

"Are your parents living?" questioned the little man in a sharp thin voice.

"No sir," replied the princess. "My mother died in France and my father died after we came to America."

"Where do your relatives live?" asked the man.

"I haven't any," replied the princess.

"With whom do you live?"

"I" — the princess stammered — "I don't really live with anybody. Billy takes care of me."

"Who's Billy?" asked the little man.

"He sells newspapers."

"Oh, splendid," exclaimed the lady, clapping her tiny hands. "Great for advertising, isn't it, Mr. McKay? Won't it

look fascinating in the papers?" The princess did not understand.

"Where is Billy?" asked the man.

"I don't know. I fought him last night for losing his money and he went away before I was up. I don't like him."

"I wonder if the child is telling the truth," said the man.

The brown eyes of the princess flashed darts of fire. "I nevaire lie," she said, stamping her foot and dropping into her old manner of speech.

"Do you speak French, little girl?" asked the woman.

"Certainment. S'est mon langue."

"Oh, perfect," chirped the woman. "Let us take her, the poor little thing." Then to the princess: "Would you like to come and live with me in a great lovely hotel, and wear pretty dresses and drive with me in the park every morning?"

"Oh, it's fairy land come true," cried the princess, remembering a story Billy

had read to her in one of the Sunday papers. "It's fairy land you mean."

"Oh no," said the lady. "It's just every-day America, but I think I can help you and you can help me, — so it will be perfectly fair. Where can we see Billy?" She turned to the man, — "I suppose we ought to get permission from somebody. We want it all regular. Where can we find Billy, little girl?"

"Oh Billy doesn't matter," exclaimed the princess, excitedly, fearing that after all the wonderful thing would not come true. "He's just a little boy that's been taking care of me. And he wouldn't get me the fur."

The lady laughed. "Well, get in right now if you want to, and we'll take you down and buy you a fur, — a whole outfit for tonight." Then to the little man: "We had better publish it tonight. Don't you think so, Mr. McKay? There's no use in waiting."

The little man answered: "I don't see

that it will do any harm. If anybody makes a claim we can give her up; and the advertising will have been just as beneficial. Perhaps it will be better that way."

The princess did not understand what they meant, but then she did not care. She was riding behind a man in a shiny hat. She hoped the children who looked at her so strangely would see her when she passed the school. She was very proud and very happy. She even hoped that Billy would see her. He'd be sorry about the fur.

They went to one of the big stores and into a little room all glass where the princess could see her back and front at the same time. A tall girl took off her dress, and when the lady with the blue eyes saw the torn little petticoat and waist, she cried: "We must begin at the inside and work out." Then the girl who undressed the princess went away and was gone what seemed a very, very long time to the child. When she came back, her

arms were foamy with white, lacey things. They took off the ragged little underskirt and waist, and put on a lovely lacey skirt and a fresh underwaist and over this a little white frock. Then there was a long black velvet coat with a big lace collar and a wide hat with plumes, put on after the little white dress.

When at last they had decided on the white dress and the black coat and the hat with plumes, the dried-up little old man came back with a nice-looking young man who asked where they had found the little girl and all sorts of other questions. The pretty lady said she had been driving through one of the crowded tenement districts looking for the address of a former maid who was ill, when she had seen this ragged little child on the corner.

When she said this, the princess was very much tempted to exclaim that she wasn't really ragged and that Billy was going to buy her a new fur, but the lady went right on, talking and laughing. She

said she was going to adopt the princess, who was an orphan, and that she was going to France on purpose to get the permission of her relatives, since she had no parents.

Then instead of leaving on the new dress, the lady told the girl who waited on them, to have all the pretty new things sent to the hotel. The girl went away with them, and the lady with the blue eyes helped the princess put on the old dress and coat. The lady said she did not think the clothes were quite shabby enough to make a good story, and she cut some holes in the dress and coat and ravelled the edges, and made a big tear in the princess's stocking at the knee. By and by they went out on the street and the young man took a black box and pointed it at them as they were getting into the carriage. Then they said good-bye to him and drove away to the hotel.

The princess felt very much ashamed of her ragged stocking and torn dress when they arrived at the hotel and hoped that

very soon the pretty lady would let her put on the wonderful new clothes. But instead of that, they went into a great red dining-room. Instead of sitting down at one of the tables near the door, the lady and the little man and the princess walked to the very end of the room while everybody turned and stared, and then whispered, and stared some more and the princess felt very hot and red, and oh, so ashamed of her ragged clothes. There was a slit down the side of the red dress that showed the lining and the lady had cut holes in the elbows and had rubbed the dress on the dusty window sill in the little room with the mirrors, doing all of these things while the salesgirl was out of the room, and laughing until her face was as pink as could be, while she did it. The little man had laughed, too, but the princess had looked on frowningly, not understanding, and too frightened to remonstrate. The princess had tried to brush the dust off when they were driving in the

carriage but the lady had taken her hands and held them saying, "My dear little girl, let it be just as it is. This afternoon you can throw away the old dress and coat and wear the new things, but it's business, my dear, to have you look your very shabbiest now. You are a part of a play, little girl."

This had helped the princess to bear it. Perhaps this pretty lady played all of the time, even when she was driving in her carriage, and the princess was only a part of the play and would be ragged and dirty for just a little while. She wished that she could have acted some other kind of a part where she could have been dressed up all of the time, but she would do her best, for wasn't there a lovely white dress and a black velvet coat and all sorts of lacey things to be worn in the next act!

At last they sat down at a table at the end of the long room, and the dried-up little man ordered things to eat. First there was a cup with two handles, standing

on a tea saucer; a nice-looking man in a black suit, set it down in front of the princess.

“ Now you must play you are very, very hungry,” said the pretty lady, “ and drink it all up as soon as you can.”

It was so very good that the princess didn't need to be told a second time but never stopped drinking until the cup was empty. When she set it down, she was quite breathless and her upper lip was covered with white foamy stuff that had floated like soapsuds on top of the cup. The lady unfolded a big piece of white cloth and mused it all up wiping the princess's mouth and when the princess looked around shyly, she saw that the people at all of the nearby tables were watching them.

After the cup had been taken away the man, who had brought it, whisked down a plate with some nice little minnows on it. The minnows were dead of course, but their heads had been left on. The prin-

cess ate these and after them came the whole of a little chicken and some peas and then a salad, not half as good as the ones stepmother made, but very good nevertheless, and some icecream packed into a little glass with a handle on it. Then after they had eaten all of these things, the waiter brought three glass bowls of water and set them down, one in front of each of them. The princess drank her water up very quickly because she liked it better than the ice water that she had been sipping all through the meal, but when she saw the lady smile and dip her fingers into the bowl, and the wizened little man do the same thing, she blushed furiously and wished she hadn't been in such a hurry to drink up the water. But the lady didn't say anything; in fact she seemed very much pleased. They all walked out of the dining-room, then, and the little man said good-bye, after promising to send the lady "the story" the moment it came out.

Then the lady walked through a number

of beautiful rooms, holding the princess's hand. There was one lined with books to the very ceiling and the lady said this was the hotel library. It was many times larger than the one Billy had built, and the princess wished that Billy could see it. Opposite the library was a lovely golden room that the lady said was the "salon" and two big rooms that she called reception rooms. The princess would have felt very happy looking at all of the beautiful rooms if she had not felt ashamed of her ragged old dress with the dust rubbed into it, especially as everybody stared at them, and some ladies and a few men seemed to follow them around. By and by the lady went into the office and after talking for a moment to a man who stood behind a high counter, asked him for her key. Very soon after that, much to the relief of the princess, they got into the elevator and rode up a very long way — until the man called, "ninth floor." They left the elevator and unlocking a door at the end of a

long corridor, went into some more lovely rooms. Here there was nobody but a woman whom the lady called, "Marie." The princess liked Marie because she spoke to the lady in French. It was not at all like the French the lady used in answering her and which sounded something like English, but the same kind of French that the princess herself spoke.

"I want you to dress this child, Marie, and have her ready to drive with me at five o'clock. Don't disturb me for two hours."

"Shall I not dress mademoiselle, first?" asked Marie.

"Oh no, take care of the child, Marie. She is to have a box at the theatre tonight and you will look after her. It is good advertising for me and it will help her. Be kind to her, Marie."

Marie nodded and began to undress the princess. Taking off her clothes, she gave her a lovely warm bath in a big tub that looked like china. After that she dressed

her in the lacey things and the white dress, talking to her all the time. She made a great many things clear to the princess. In the first place she explained that the lady was really Estelle Russell, the prima donna, and that the wizened little man was her manager. Marie was only a maid, although she wore a very nice fitting black dress with a white apron trimmed with embroidery. Marie explained that Mademoiselle Russell was what is called "a great advertiser;" that she was always doing something unusual in order to have the papers print stories about her. For a long time now there hadn't been much in the papers, but tonight there would be a long story and the house would be packed the rest of the week when people found out that the pretty Mademoiselle, out of her great, kind heart, had adopted a poor little child of the streets. The princess thought that Marie's voice did not sound as if she really meant the nice things she said of Mademoiselle, but she felt very

happy, nevertheless, when at last she was all fresh and dainty in the wonderful white dress.

She wondered what would happen when the white dress was soiled, for she was afraid she could not keep it clean always, but Marie said there would be others, because Mademoiselle was very generous.

In spite of the white dress, and the black velvet coat and the kindness of Marie, the afternoon passed slowly until five o'clock. Usually the princess was quite busy skipping about the yard to see if anything new had been thrown into it during the night. Then after the yard had been gone over, it was the custom of the princess to take a walk; this was very exciting as there were any number of fascinating windows to be looked into within seven or eight blocks of the big yard. There was one window that the princess loved above all others. In it were dolls and dolls' houses, and dolls' furniture of all kinds, that set the princess to dreaming

of the things she would have when she was grown up and very rich. The princess did not care especially to own a doll, for, it must be acknowledged, as yet she was very selfish and wanted too many things with which to decorate her own little body, to care for toys. Then too, she knew nothing about the pleasure of mothering a doll baby, having never possessed one in her life. The dolls in their dainty frocks, the carriages and the stuffed furniture only suggested to her things she would like for herself and she was accustomed to spend many minutes of every day before the window. Then there were some fascinating games that she played on rainy days. One was a game of "Which will you take," in which she went over Billy's collection of pictures again and again, giving herself the privilege of choosing one thing for her very own from each of the many pictures. Besides, there were the children whom she watched on their way to and from school. Sometimes they tried to talk with her but

the princess seldom responded. Once, when one of the girls asked shyly, by way of making conversation, "What is your name?" the princess had answered proudly, "Princess," and the little girl had laughed and run away to tell her mates. After that the children had looked at her strangely and she had frowned back at them. Sometimes they had pulled her curls when she was looking the other way, running away quickly when she turned to glower at them and calling back, "She's a princess, she's a princess!"

Nevertheless it had all been exciting, and had helped her to pass her day and now the minutes dragged with nothing to do but watch herself in the mirror, for Marie was too busy to talk much, and besides the princess was expected to be very quiet while Miss Russell slept. When four o'clock came, Marie went to her mistress, and so the princess was left alone for a whole hour. Then there was an enchanting drive, and at six o'clock two trays were

sent up filled with covered dishes. The dishes from the trays were set on a table in the big sitting-room where the princess had spent the afternoon. Miss Russell ate her supper alone at this table and after she had finished, Marie and the princess had their supper. This made the princess cross. When Billy adopted her he promised to wait on her and give her the best things, but Miss Russell made her eat left-overs with Marie, who was a servant.

However, a little later, the princess forgot her grievance for she was driven away to the theatre where she sat alone in a box near the stage from which Miss Russell kissed the tips of her fingers at her and twice the wizened man, who Marie had said was Miss Russell's manager, came to ask how she was getting on. And everybody in the theatre looked at her. Even when their eyes were covered with their opera glasses, she could tell they were looking at her for the glasses pointed straight at her box. Consequently the

princess felt very proud and happy that she had left the packing box and the hogs-head and the crude little lean-to, for ever. She saw the young man who had snatched the black box at her standing on the stage in one of the wings. He was laughing and talking with somebody and every now and then he looked at the princess. Before the play was over, Marie, in her black dress and white apron, came and took her behind the scenes and sat her on a shelf out of the way of everybody, but where she could see the stage.

“You made a great hit, Hortense,” said Marie, who didn’t call her princess although she knew that Billy did and that the princess liked the name. “You made a great hit and everybody’s pleased. Here’s the newspaper. The press agent wrote it,” and she nodded towards the young man who had pointed the black box. Then she gave the princess a paper folded back to show a large picture. It was a picture of the princess in a ragged dress, with

Miss Russell bending over her. There was a long article, two columns, telling about it all, but the princess couldn't make the letters mean all that was intended and for the first time she missed Billy. He could have read it without skipping more than two or three words. The princess wondered if Marie could read it all and more important still, if she would.



CHAPTER XIV

WHAT THE PAPER SAID



WHAT do the letters b-e-g-g-a-r say, Marie?" asked the princess, the next day when Marie came to dress her for dinner.

Marie shook her head, discouragingly. "I cannot read English," she answered the princess in French.

"Do you think I am — b-e-g-g-a-r, Marie?" continued Hortense. Marie did not know and Miss Russell was taking her "siesta;" something that the princess decided was a very delicate thing because everybody was expected to keep so very quiet and not "jar around," in the meantime. The princess felt discouraged. She had tried to make the little black letters

mean something, and after she had spelt over the first three lines until her eyes ached, she could still only make out detached words; a "the" and a "little" and "girl." So she had resolved to ask Marie, but it seemed that Marie could do no better than she could do, herself. Perhaps Miss Russell would read the article to her. It was a very hopeless "perhaps" for the princess had already discovered that Miss Russell had no time. She had to go to so many rehearsals. Then she had to have her hair done, and her nails done, and her face done, and the princess was expected to sit very quietly in the corner of the sofa and ask no questions because "children got on Miss Russell's nerves." So the princess tried again to put some meaning into the words while Marie brushed her hair before the long glass. Just as Marie had finished brushing, something unusual happened. A little bell tinkled somewhere. Marie hurried away in response to it and then came back with the news that Miss

Russell had sent for Hortense to come and amuse her.

The princess found Miss Russell lying on the bed in a pale pink wrapper. She motioned the princess to sit down and the princess perched herself on the chair farthest from the bed.

“ Oh, don't make me scream, come over here beside me,” said Miss Russell, pleasantly.

The princess climbed down from the chair obediently, and sat down on a little stool that Miss Russell indicated with a slender hand loaded with rings. The princess thought the hand must get very tired carrying so many rings.

“ How does it feel to be famous, Hortense? ” asked Miss Russell, smiling. There was something patronizing in Miss Russell's voice and the princess resented it, but for the first time in her life she concealed her feelings.

“ I don't understand ‘ famous,’ ” she said demurely.

“Why to have everybody talking about you and staring at you. How does it feel?”

“Are they talking about me?” asked the princess opening her eyes.

“Of course. Aren’t there two whole columns in the paper about you?”

The princess nodded. “I guess so, but I couldn’t read it, — not all of it,” said the princess. “Am I b-e-g-g-a-r?”

“Oh no, not any more. You were a beggar but I rescued you. That’s what it’s about.”

Suddenly Miss Russell was confronted by a little figure with clenched fists and a face that flashed fury. “Did it say that in the paper? Did it say that lie, that I was a beggar?” The princess stamped her foot and Miss Russell sat up in bed laughing.

“Of course. What did you think it was going to say? You were a little beggar, weren’t you, until I picked you up?”

“I was nevaire, nevaire a beggar. I

had ze house and ze servant," cried the princess, relapsing into her foreign accent. "Billy would soon be one vaire rich man. Oh, — and they talk in the whole world zat I am beggar?"

The little form went face downward, white dress and all, upon the floor by the bed and Miss Russell, quite at a loss what to do, rang helplessly for Marie.

"Oh take the child away, Marie. She is quite impossible."

Marie bent over the princess; "Come, cherie Hortense," she said. "We will have supper." But Hortense only beat a wild tattoo on the floor with two little patent leather shoes. "Go away, I do not like you. I want to go home," she cried. "Go away."

It was a shaky little voice, and the words ended in a sob.

Marie bent over the child and stroked her hair, awkwardly. "You will spoil the pretty dress and then you can't sit in the

box with everybody looking at you," said Marie.

"Oh, I don't want them to look at me. They think I'm a beggar. I want Billy," screamed the princess.

"She is utterly impossible," said Miss Russell a second time. "I'm sure after all we've done for the child, she is most ungrateful. Take her away."

So Marie took the princess away and laid her on her own bed and tried to comfort her but the princess sobbed as if her heart would break, her face in the pillow, until at last, entirely worn out with grief and wounded pride, she dropped to sleep. That night it was a very red-eyed little person that occupied the stage box at the Gayety, — a little person who kept her back towards the audience all through the long performance although Mr. McKay came three times to tell her to turn around and stop sulking. But the princess, who had never learned obedience, paid no attention to him. "I do not want them to stare

at me," she said each time. "I want to go home."

Things were improved a little the next day when Miss Russell told her that she had simply been teasing the princess and that everybody knew that she had never been a beggar; that b-e-g-g-a-r spelled, "pretty" and that if the princess did not believe it she could ask Mr. McKay. The princess wanted to believe it so much that she was almost convinced, and behaved a trifle better on the two or three following nights and almost forgot about it during the hours when she rode behind the black horse and the man with the shiny hat.



CHAPTER XV

BILLY SEES THE PRINCESS AND HAS AN ADVENTURE



BILLY hunted in vain for the princess, letting his business suffer from neglect. The night that she disappeared he refused to believe that she had left him and the little house and the gold field for ever. He searched every corner of the excavation for her and went over every foot of the empty lot where she could have possibly hidden herself. Then having looked in all of the possible places he searched for her in the impossible ones, under odds and ends of old lumber, among the tin cans, and even inside the little house in the cupboards where he stored his treasures. Failing to discover her he cheered himself by saying over and over again,

“She’ll be back in a minute or two. She’s just making believe lost,” and began his search all over again.

Finally when no chance remained of her being either in the house or lot he prepared a beautiful supper with butter and strawberry jam, whistling bravely as he worked. He laid the table with his very best china putting his most precious blue and white plate, the one with only a single triangular piece broken out of it, at the princess’s place. When everything was ready he went outside and sat down on the doorstep, the real doorstep that he had made himself, and waited.

He waited until night settled down over the empty lot and the great arc light in the street shone over the high board fence and cast strange shadows here and there. He waited until the clock in the square rang nine, and ten, and eleven, and then he went inside and lay down on the floor of the ell with his face hidden in his folded arms. Of course the princess would come

back, of course she would, he said bravely, but it was just as well for him to wait for her lying face down on the floor as to sit for ever on the doorstep. Besides it was dark inside the little house so she could not see that his eyes were red. Outside the light from the arc lamps made the yard as bright as moonlight. The princess would come back. He was sure she would if he just waited long enough. She was only making believe lost. She would come back, she would, she would.

In the morning Billy dallied over breakfast and lost many sales by waiting at home until nine o'clock. Then he went to work, but in a half-hearted way. It was hard to watch for customers with one eye always looking, looking for the princess.

He began to play a make-believe game with himself. She was a real princess being kept in a tower by an ogre and he must find the tower, kill the ogre and rescue the princess. It was like a story Mrs. Hawkins used to read to him from the

yellow fairy book when he was a little, little boy, not more than eight or nine years old. Billy had outgrown fairy land long ago, more than two years ago, even before he left the boarding-house, but it was comforting now to go back to his belief in fairies and ogres and enchanted towers, in spite of business and going on twelve.

After he had once thought out this game he was to play with himself he started to look for the tower and the ogre, and on the second day decided that the ogre was the tall boy who said "scissors" and who had stolen the money that was to have bought the tippet for the princess.

He must find the tall boy and wreak vengeance upon him. At night and in the early morning he hung about the square where he had first met him. He felt sure that some day he should see him again. Then he would leap upon him bearing him to the ground and holding him there until he had given back the money he had stolen

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the slouching figure squarely in the stomach with his hard little head. The figure doubled and went down, squirming and gasping for breath.

“Take that,” cried Billy, “and this,” he continued, thumping the prostrate form mercilessly.

“Here! Here!” shouted Officer Murphy, coming up and swinging his club. “Can’t you see that the fellow’s down and out. You hit him below the belt and that’s not according to rules. Let up on him, Billy, my boy. What’s your grudge?” There was a twinkle in the big officer’s eye, and although his club swung menacingly Billy was not afraid.

“He’s the tall one,” panted Billy. “He robbed me twice, you remember, and he’s kidnapped the princess. Let me go,” as Officer Murphy grasped his flying arms. “Let me go. I want to lick him.”

“Oh, come, give him a show and tell me what it’s all about,” said the officer, remembering perfectly Billy’s story, but

curious to hear what the tall boy would have to say for himself.

"He's a thief. He left me without a cent after taking me into partnership. Afterwards he broke into my house and robbed me and then he took the princess. Just give me a chance to get even. He's my size."

"He's big enough to eat you alive. Let up a moment. He's getting his wind. Let's hear what he has to say."

The tall boy raised himself on his elbow. "Aw, Cornelius," he gasped, "what's the row?"

"My name's not Cornelius," cried Billy. Then, wheedlingly, "Oh, give me a fair show, Mr. Murphy. Let me get at him."

"Yes, officer, let him go. I like little boys. Give me a chance to eat him alive," said the tall boy, getting awkwardly to his feet. "Let him at me."

Billy felt as if he should burst with rage, but Officer Murphy held him firmly.

"Now let's have your story, Billy. Just

what have you against Long Louis, who's a janitor of this block? "

" I met him on his way to California and saved him from the cops," grinned the tall boy. " So he's going to lick me within an inch of my life. Let him at me Mr. Officer. I'm spoilin' for a fight."

" Yes," said Billy squaring himself and thrusting his hands into his pockets. " I met you on my way to California and you said ' let's have a college ice.' Then you bought beefsteak and I paid for it. I went home with you, and you said we'd be partners but you skinned off before I was up with my money, almost three dollars, besides the beefsteak I'd paid for. I didn't hear anything more about you until last week. I'd saved up enough to buy a stove for the ell, Mr. Murphy, you remember the house I've built in the lot on Oxbridge Street where Mr. Harkness gave me the lease. Well, after I built the house I saved money enough for a stove and a fur tippet for the princess, when he comes along,

looks through the window when I'm telling the princess about the money and where it is hidden, and robs me the next day while the princess and I are both away. And now the princess has gone."

"Oh, scissors!" squeaked the tall boy raising his right hand and bringing the tips of his fingers together in mock daintiness. "A princess. Oh, gee! Cornelius. An' I see'd her, — the princess, — all in satin and velvet and a crown. Oh, scissors! An' how about the house with the li-ber-ary and the piaz-zer and the flower garden that you promised her? Oh, scissors!"

"I knew you were looking in," cried Billy. "I knew you were, and you came back and robbed me and made the princess run away, or else you stole her. You see, Mr. Murphy, he wouldn't know about the house with the li-berary if he hadn't been looking in."

"Where did you hear about this house, Louis?" demanded the officer.

The tall boy began to squirm. He realized that he had been indiscreet.

"Oh, I'm just jollyin'. I never laid eyes on the young 'un in my life; that is, not since I saved him from the cops," he corrected himself, as Officer Murphy released Billy and took the tall boy by the collar. "Honest, I was jollyin'."

"You say he robbed you twice?" questioned the officer turning to Billy.

"Yes, once when I was a little bit of a fellow and didn't know about the world, and again last week, when he broke into the house. I was showing the princess, — she's the little girl I kind of adopted. I call her princess because her name's a hard one. As I was saying I was showing her the money I'd saved when I heard him say, 'scissors.' I knew who it was and I ran out to find him but he had run away. Then I went back and forgot about him, for I was telling about a big house I was going to build. The next morning the money was there all right but at night it

was gone. He took it while the princess was away. She used to come to the bridge to meet me to see if I had brought her anything, an apple or a ribbon, or something like that," said Billy trying to speak lightly although the memory of the princess standing at the edge of the bridge waiting for him made his mouth jerk at the corners. "When we got home the money was gone. We kept it in a secret drawer in the table that I made on purpose for it. Nobody knew about the drawer excepting the princess and me. He looked in at the window and saw us. Then the next day he came and robbed us and the princess was mad because the money was gone and she couldn't have the tippet I had promised her. Now she's disappeared. Mr. Murphy won't you please let me fight him?"

"I'll attend to him, Billy. How much did he take?"

"Two dollars and sixty-nine cents and the beefsteak, the first time, and three dollars the second time."

“ Well, Billy, we’ll just go down to the station house and you can enter a complaint.”

But going to the station house was the last thing the tall boy wished to do. He tried to jerk his shoulder from the officer’s grasp, hoping by a quick dash to get away and lose himself in the crowd of men, women and children that had gathered about them. But the officer held him firmly.

“ Nothing of the kind, young man,” he muttered. “ I’ve had my eye on you for two weeks, and now with a definite charge against you we’ll see that you are sent to the reformatory for a time, anyway. Come along, Billy.”

But like the tall boy, Billy was reluctant to go to the station house. Even more than he wanted revenge he wanted to find the princess, and the realization that he was very young and that they might send him to his uncle Nathan when they found

out that he had run away, made him hesitate.

"I'd rather wait, Mr. Murphy," he remonstrated.

"I'll tell you, officer. The kid don't want to make no charge. He's on shaky ground, himself. I'll give him five dollars, if he'll call it square. To-day was pay day an' I'm blowin' myself in all directions. Might as well help Cornelius out. Excuse me officer, my high spirits run away with me. I'll play square, if you and Cornelius will let me off this time, an' I'll pay the rest next month."

"You'll pay now, and I'm not sure that we won't send you up besides."

"Sure, Mr. Officer, if you say so I'll pay. Just let me at my wallet."

He took a tobacco pouch from the waistband of his trousers and counted out five dollars and seventy-five cents. This he handed reluctantly to Billy. "That's going some, isn't it, Cornelius?" he said with a leer. "Now, Mr. Officer, if there's nothing

more I can do for you I'll vamoose, hoping Cornelius will find the princess. Don't get into the habit of pawning her diamonds to build them li-ber-aries."

But the officer still held him by the shoulder.

"I think, Billy," he said grimly, "that we'll all walk over to the station-house. This isn't the kind of a boy to be left around loose."

Billy had been searching his pockets for change and now handed the tall boy six cents. "There's your change. It's all right about the beefsteak." Then he turned to Officer Murphy. "I'd rather not go to the station-house, to-day, sir. I think I'll go down to see Mr. Harkness and I haven't much time."

"All right, if you don't want to lodge a complaint, we'll call it off," said Officer Murphy. "But I'll give you just twenty-four hours to get out of this neighbourhood, young man, and I'll lock you up if I ever see you around here again," he

continued with a scowl at the tall boy, who had pulled off his cap and was bowing in a sort of mock deference.

“ Thank you, Mr. Officer, and thank you, Cornelius. You’re a sure enough infant all right, all right. I trusted you and you squealed on me. But take the money, you’re welcome to it. Take it and build that there castle for the princess an’ think of me when you’re drivin’ de golden chariot around the estate I left you. Bye, bye.”

He turned and shambled off down the street, the officer and a mob of children following at a distance.

Billy walked slowly across the bridge, half dazed by what had happened. During the months that had passed he had almost forgotten Mr. Harkness. On the rare occasions when he had thought of him it had been with a feeling not entirely pleasant. He owed Mr. Harkness ten dollars. It was a debt he must sometime pay. He

was sure that in the golden future it would be the simplest thing in the world to balance their account but in the meantime he had the true debtor's instinct to keep out of his creditor's path. Now, quite unexpectedly, he had become opulent. He would go to Mr. Harkness' office and pay at least half of what he owed. The thought exhilarated him. Possibly Mr. Harkness could help him find the princess. He would go to him at once.

He started to cross the street but stopped short in amazement. There, directly in front of him in a shining carriage was the princess. He knew her in spite of the great hat with the waving plumes and the black velvet coat with the wide lace collar.

“ Princess! ” he called.

She turned and saw him. She started slightly, then she threw back her head and looked straight before her. The carriage drove on. Billy stood staring after it. The princess had seen him and had cut him

dead. He felt that his heart was breaking. Then suddenly something struck him; everything went red before his eyes; then there was darkness. A huge yellow automobile stopped with a groan as the breaks were thrown on and the clutch jerked out. A crowd gathered but Billy lay white and still. He could not see the pitying faces looking down at him.

Somebody sent a hurry call for an ambulance. In a moment more the little figure was tenderly lifted and carried away. It was covered with blood and dust and one arm hung limp from the shoulder. For the time being Billy was down and out.



CHAPTER XVI

MISS RUSSELL HAS A CALLER



THE princess was lying asleep on Marie's bed and Miss Russell was having her face done. This operation, the princess had learned, took a long time. It consisted of oiling and patting and deftly pinching and smoothing Miss Russell's skin until it was as red as red could be. Then there were towels wrung out in hot water and towels wrung out in cold water applied, and after that a dusting of powder. It had been interesting for two or three times, and then the princess had found that there was a great sameness about it and had fallen into the habit of taking a nap during the operation. She took her nap on Marie's bed because her own little bed folded up into

a box during the day so that Marie would have room to move around, for Marie and the princess shared the same room; a room only a little larger than the piano box, the princess thought, when she first saw it, and not nearly as large as the new ell.

As has been said, the princess was having a nap when she was suddenly awakened by a voice that sounded familiar.

“She is no good, zat girl,” said the voice. “I haf work for her all ze time since ze fazer die and she care only for spend ze money; she no care for ze baybay, she always fix ze hair, ze dress. I do ze fine sewing all ze day and sometimes in ze night, too — ze embroidery, Mademoiselle — to earn ze money. Zat girl, zat Hortense, — she help me not one hour in ze day. She is on ze street, she will not look for ze baybay and bym bye one good friend haf said, ‘make her sell ze paper; make her earn ze money.’ But she refuse. I buy her nozzing, no shoes, no stockings, nozzing and I whip her all ze time. Bym

bye when she haf nozzing to wear she go on ze street wiz ze paper. For two, three days, she sell ze paper, zen she disappear. I know nozzing more of her and I haf a fear zat bad haf happened to zat girl. I look for her. I am vaire unhappy. I tell ze police, but nozzing come. After a vaire long time a friend come wiz ze paper zat haf her picture and zat says she is here. I say I will see zat child and find if she is well, so I haf come for zat, Mademoiselle, for I haf been left to look after zat girl and I would do my best. She es well? ”

“ Oh, yes, indeed, but you may have her back. She is quite impossible.”

“ Oh, Mademoiselle, I no want her back. When she es happy wiz you, eet es good.”

“ But I am afraid I cannot keep her, Madame. I can do nothing at all with her. She is vain and stubborn and I am so busy with my new opera that I have very little time. I think you will have to take the child whether you wish to do it or not and

you must make her work. I really feel very sorry for you, Madame, but I do not see how I can help you. The child told me she had no relatives in this country or I should have looked you up before."

Oh! the coldness of Miss Russell's voice. The princess shuddered and sat up. She would never go back, never, never, — to take care of the cross little baby and sell papers. She would go to Billy. The day before she had seen him on the street and she had longed ever since for the strange little house, — the house where she had been a real princess. She must run away. She must wait for nothing. In a minute Marie would come for her and she would have to go away with the cross little woman whom she must call "mama" — that woman who was not her mother. There was no time for anything if she would save herself. She slipped from the bed and taking her coat and the hat with the plume, she opened the door into the corridor, slipped into the main hall and

not waiting for an elevator, ran down the eight long flights of stairs and out of the great door that a coloured boy held open for her, into the street. On and on she hurried, glancing back over her shoulder now and then to see if she was followed, turning corner after corner. When at last she thought she was safe from pursuit, she stopped a kind-faced woman to ask the way to Oxbridge. The woman looked at the little girl in the velvet coat and the wide hat with its waving plume, astonished.

"It is very far," she said. "Are you lost?"

"Oh no," replied the princess. "Only confused. My house is in Oxbridge." The princess spoke naturally.

"I will show you the car," said the woman. "We are two blocks from the line."

For an instant the princess hesitated. It took money to ride on street cars and she had no money. Then a happy thought

came to her. She would follow the car line to the bridge; from the bridge she knew the way.

“Thank you,” she said to the woman.

When they reached the car line the princess knew where she was. It was a yellow car that went to Oxbridge. She knew her way very well, now, and begged the woman not to wait. But the woman insisted on seeing her safely aboard the car, so there was nothing for the princess to do but make the best of it. She would tell the conductor she had forgotten her purse. The worst he could do would be to put her off. But the conductor had no idea of putting off this pretty child in the velvet coat and the plumed hat; so the princess rode all the way to the bridge for nothing. Then, leaving the car she scampered like the wind across the long bridge. She was happier than she had been for a week. She knew she would have to explain to Billy why she had turned her face away that day when he had seen her in the carriage.

There was a sore little place in her heart at the memory of his hurt look when he saw her first, — and then she had looked away without speaking. Even to herself, it was hard to explain why she had done it. She had run away from Billy after fighting with him for losing the money and she had felt suddenly ashamed to have him see her riding in the carriage behind the black horse and the man with the shiny hat. She hoped Billy had not recognized her that day. Perhaps he had not, for she had turned away quickly and he had never seen her in a hat with a plume, and in a velvet coat, but she felt this hope was vain. Still Billy loved her. He always understood, and he would understand now. It was not because she was too proud to speak to him — and yet, perhaps she had been a little proud and afraid Miss Russell would laugh at her friend. Yes, she acknowledged, finally, *perhaps* she had been a little proud but she would not tell Billy. She would say that she had been

ashamed that she had run away. Now she had come back and he must forgive her. He would surely be glad to take her to the theatre in the velvet coat and the white dress and the hat with the plume. And they would take the opera glasses and "pretend rich." It was more fun after all to "pretend rich" than to be rich. Being rich was stupid. Just as this conviction came home to her, she recognized the gray fence in the distance, and wondered if Billy was at home. It was Sunday, she remembered, and Billy usually picked up the house on Sunday. She came to the place in the fence where the hole had been, but it was boarded up. Near-by, however, there was a large knothole. She put her toe into the knothole and climbed to the top, hanging for a moment from her hands before she let herself drop on the other side. She noticed that she had covered her coat with dust but she did not stop to brush it off. She was in a great hurry to see the little house and to find Billy. The

yard had been cleaned up, she saw, since she went away, and some work had been done in the excavation. It was almost stoned up and there was a cement floor. However, there was the little house, snug and safe on the other side of it. Even if the workmen had come to finish the factory so long abandoned, Billy had a lease and they could go on living in the little house. She would not mind the noise of the factory.

At last she reached the little house, but the smaller windows were closed and it seemed strangely deserted. She crept around to the ell and looked into the big window. The room seemed to be cluttered with tools and workmen's benches. A great fear gripped her. Perhaps Billy had gone away! Perhaps he had gone to California. She felt suddenly helpless. Nobody wanted her, not even Billy; he had gone away and left her. Her stepmother had said she was a bad girl and Miss Russell had called her an "impossible child." Be-

wildered and frightened for the first time in her life, she sat down on the doorstep — the step where she and Billy had pretended rich so often, and sobbed, the tears running down and spotting the black velvet coat. Nobody loved her and she was going to die. She was going to starve to death and Billy would not care. Maybe he would come back and finding her there on the doorstep starved to death, he would be sorry. But it was very hard to starve to death all alone. She hoped Billy would come soon. It wouldn't be so hard to die if he were there to see her. She sat there crying softly until the cold crept under the velvet coat and numbed her. It was really very cold but she did not feel like leaving the doorstep.

It would be easier to sit there until Billy came.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE HOSPITAL



THE clocks were striking six when Billy finally opened his eyes and tried to sit up. Finding himself done up in bandages, as it seemed to him, from his head to his feet, he vaguely wondered what had happened, and was just drifting off into unconsciousness, when a young woman in a gray dress, a white apron and a cunning cap, leaned over him.

“It’s the sanitarium,” murmured Billy,
“Where’s mother?”

“She’ll be here presently, I hope. Let me give you some of this broth.” The young woman held a cup and a spoon.
“Don’t try to move.”

It was a funny spoon and nothing spilled

although the woman thrust it gently between Billy's teeth while he was still lying flat on his back. Immediately Billy felt better. The fluid warmed him and left a pleasant sensation in spite of the fact that it was slightly sickish to smell and taste.

"May I have a drink of water, please," asked Billy, after two more spoonfuls of the liquid had been swallowed. The nurse brought the water. "Why am I all tied up?" asked Billy, after drinking.

"You have been hurt."

"By an automobile. I kind of remember."

"Yes. You were knocked down and there's quite a severe scalp wound. You're all right now excepting for your arm and a rib."

"Arm broken?" asked Billy.

"Yes, and one rib. Nothing serious," said the nurse.

"How long will I have to stay here on my back?" asked Billy. "I'm just awfully busy."

“Not long, we hope. Is there anyone to whom we can send word? Your mother?”

Billy thought for a moment. “Mother’s pretty sick,” he said finally. “I think it would worry her. And there isn’t anybody else, excepting Mr. Harkness.”

“Mr. Harkness is coming back this evening.”

“Coming back! How’d he know I was here?”

“He knocked you down.”

“But he’s my friend. J. F. Harkness, I mean.”

“I think those are the initials. Here is his card. He said we were to let him know all about you. But I thought he didn’t know you. He asked me to get your name and address so that he could go around right away to see your parents.”

“He knows my name’s Billy Lewis, and he knows my mother’s in the sanitarium,” said Billy, mystified.

The nurse thought a moment. “I sup-

pose the blood and bruises made you quite unrecognizable. Is there any one else to whom you wish to have word sent? ”

“ Dad’s dead and mother’s sick. She’s worse off than I am because Mrs. Hawkins said she couldn’t see a soul. Her’s is catching. Say, is this the sanitarium? ”

“ No, this is the children’s hospital. As soon as you can sit up you’ll see that we have a great many little patients. But you mustn’t tire yourself. You’d better go to sleep now.”

“ I don’t want to sleep any more,” muttered Billy, but even as he spoke he yawned as widely as he could with a corner of his mouth held together by a wide strip of court plaster. “ Say, I must look like a mummy in the museum with all these wrappings.”

The nurse smiled and lifted his head ever so gently to smooth his pillow. “ Now go to sleep like a good little boy,” she said.

At any other time Billy would have

resented being called a little boy, but now it somehow seemed very grateful to him. He felt unusually weak. He would have liked nothing better than to have turned over and had a good cry, he felt so shaky and tired. He yawned again, and winked his eyes trying to keep awake. He wondered drowsily where the nurse had gone and when Mr. Harkness was coming. Then he yielded to the weakness and the drowsy feeling and, closing his eyes, dropped off into a long sleep.

Meantime Mr. Harkness came and seemed very much surprised when the nurse told him that the boy who had been hurt was Billy Lewis.

“Billy Lewis!” exclaimed Mr. Harkness. “Why I was on my way to see him — to look him up. I had some great news for the little chap. May I see him?”

The nurse shook her head. “He’s asleep now and, as he’s been badly shaken up, besides the injuries, we think he’d better sleep as long as he will. The concussion

was serious and we feared at first that there was worse than a scalp wound on his head, but he's doing well now."

"You'll see that he gets the best of care. Wouldn't he do better in a private room?"

The nurse shrugged her shoulders. "You might ask Doctor Mills, but I don't think it is necessary. He'll find more to interest him in the wards. Children don't enjoy being shut away by themselves usually."

"All right. Do everything you can for him and I'll come in tomorrow. Tell him I'm coming, will you please. I think it will cheer him up a little," continued Mr. Harkness, going to the door of the reception-room where the nurse had found him.

"You look a little pale yourself, sir," she said in her professional voice. "I think you'd better have a long night's sleep."

Mr. Harkness laughed. "I confess it did shake me up a good deal. It's the first time I ever ran anybody down and the

sensation is more novel than pleasant. I thought at first we had killed the little chap. It made me feel wretched for a few minutes. Well, look out for him. Good-bye."

Mr. Harkness rode slowly away in his big car and the nurse went back to take a look at Billy, rigid in his bandages and strips of plaster.



CHAPTER XVIII

BILLY FINDS THE PRINCESS



HE sun was shining brightly into the big screened-in sun-parlour at the children's hospital, where Billy, dressed for the first time since the accident, sat watching the score or more little boys and girls who shared the room with him. They were pale and a trifle listless, but nevertheless happy-looking children. There were toys without end for them to play with and gentle-looking nurses to see that they did not get too weary and to tell them the most delightful stories when they were tired of play. Billy had erected a cathedral from some building blocks, but it had been slow and rather unsatisfactory work as his right hand was

still in a sling, and he wore a plaster cast on account of the broken rib.

Presently a commotion at one end of the room drew his eyes from the little girl who, in a tiny rocker, was singing a Lithuanian lullaby to a huge china doll. The children who were playing at that end of the room suddenly scattered, making way for a nurse who wheeled a small invalid's chair in which some little patient, weaker than the others in the room, was being brought in to enjoy the sunshine and toys. The chair was brought very close to Billy, who watched the nurse as she turned back the covers a trifle and arranged the movable chairback so that its occupant could sit up. Billy could see the thin line of a very pale cheek and noticed that the dark hair was cropped close to the head which seemed large for the neck which was so thin that it showed a deep furrow between the cords at the back.

“Are you comfortable now, dear?”

asked the nurse, preparing to leave her small patient.

"Oh yes," replied a weary little voice that caused Billy to jump up so suddenly that he almost smashed the plaster cast that held him.

That voice Billy knew. It was the voice of the princess. He was sure of it, and yet he hesitated. The princess was not here, she was driving behind a shiny black horse and a driver in a still shinier hat. He had seen her with his own eyes and she had looked away haughtily, as she said she would look away, when she was rich and passed the school children. Besides, the princess had a round little neck, and her head did not droop, and she wore her hair in curls. And yet, there was surely something familiar about the pathetic little figure in the invalid's chair. Billy edged nearer.

The little girl leaned her head against the pillow and Billy saw her profile. It was — IT WAS THE PRINCESS! The

surprise was enough to give even the best behaved broken bones on earth a twinge. But what was the mere twinge of half-knit bones to the joy of finding the princess?

“Princess!” Billy spoke barely above a whisper in his excitement, but the princess heard and looked up at Billy.

“Billy,” she choked and then the great tears began to roll down her thin little cheeks and drip, drip on her white bodice. “Oh Billy, I’m so sick and lonesome,” sobbed the princess. “Why did you go away?”

Billy had been sick and lonesome too, and had wondered the same thing. He tried to control himself and to talk sensibly but when a fellow has been bowled over by an automobile and is going about with five stitches in his temple, with his arm in a sling and his body in a plaster cast he is in no more condition for explanations and questions than is a little girl of nine who has been in bed for three weeks with an

attack of pneumonia. The result was that both the princess and Billy ended by silently crying. Not because there was anything at all to cry about, but simply because they were both too weak and happy to do anything else.

Mr. Harkness, coming into the sun-parlour in search of Billy, found his protegee red-eyed and choky.

“ Hello, Billy,” said Mr. Harkness, looking anywhere but at Billy, who was drying his eyes on the back of his left hand. “ It’s great to find you able to be up. In a day or two I’ll have you down at the house.”

“ You’re not going to leave me again,” implored the princess, weakly. “ You’ll stay here until I go away, won’t you Billy? ”

Mr. Harkness looked at the strange little girl in amazement. But Billy hastened to explain.

“ It’s the princess, Mr. Harkness. She’s been having pneumonia. We just this minute found each other.”

“And now he’s going away,” moaned the princess.

Mr. Harkness stared. Could this be the imperious little lady of whom Billy had told him so much? Mr. Harkness was a very young man and hardly able to realize the alterations a three weeks’ illness can make in one’s face and spirits. Surely this wee morsel of femininity was as harmless as his own small sister.

“I’m glad to see you, princess,” said Mr. Harkness, holding out his hand. “Now I’m going to get a chair and hear about everything. How you happen to be here, where you went when you so mysteriously disappeared — all about you. Then Billy’s to tell me about his day and we’ll wind up the visit with some very good news that I’m holding up my sleeve for Billy. We’ll begin with the princess. She’ll tell us first where she went when she disappeared.”

“Oh, I just went to be adopted by a rich lady. We didn’t like each other, and

I ran away to find Billy and he wasn't there any more; the little house was all locked up and empty and every thing torn up in the yard. I didn't have any money and I didn't know what to do, so I just stayed at the house to starve to death and in the morning I was sick, oh very sick, here. It hurt." The princess touched her chest. "I couldn't breathe without a needle sticking right into me, and then somebody brought me here, and now I am a convalescent." The princess pronounced the long word cautiously.

"But, princess," said Mr. Harkness, using the name Billy had given her, "who was the lady who — who adopted you?"

"Oh," said the princess, indifferently, "she was a singing lady. Her name is, — oh, Miss Estelle Russell. She told lies to the newspaper and I ran away. She said I was a beggar."

"Why, princess, I think I saw something about that in the paper but I never thought of its being you, or anybody else

for that matter. I thought it was a newspaper yarn to boom Miss Russell. And 'twas really you?"

"Of course. Didn't you go to the theatre? I sat right down close to the stage in a box. Everybody looked at me. I didn't like it after the lies in the paper. She said I was a beggar." Then suddenly changing the subject, "Did you ever have your face done, Mr. Harkness?"

Mr. Harkness laughed. "Done? I don't know."

"Maybe you say massaged. It makes your face just fiery red. Miss Russell has hers done. Marie does it."

Mr. Harkness laughed again, but stopped as the princess sank weakly back against her pillows.

"Now, Billy, we'll let the details of the princess's story go. She seems a little seedy yet. Tell me about your day."

"Oh, nothing in mine. Just changed the bandages, that's all. Hold on, there

was something else. I had a visitor. Know him? ”

Billy fumbled in his pocket. “ He sent this card.”

Mr. Harkness looked at the card.

“ Alfred Peat,” he read aloud. “ Seems to me I’ve heard that name.”

“ He said he was a lawyer for the poor people.”

“ Oh yes, I remember now. A clever scamp. What did he want of you? ”

“ He said he had come to offer me his services. Had heard about my case. He said I could sue you, Mr. Harkness, for ten thousand dollars damages.”

“ Whew,” whistled Mr. Harkness. “ I guess you could and get it, too. What did you tell him? ”

“ I told him to get out or I’d punch his head off. I said we were friends. He said you were ‘ playing friend ’ because you were afraid, and I told him to get out in a hurry. He didn’t and I called the nurse. I never would have seen him if I’d known

what he wanted, Mr. Harkness. He said I was foolish and I called him a few names and then the nurse came and he went away."

"But I guess you could get the money, all right, Billy," mused Mr. Harkness. "But we'll settle the case out of court. We'll find out what damages you want later."

Billy flushed. "Don't fool me, Mr. Harkness. I'm too weak — I'm no good on earth and can't get back at anybody. Couldn't even punch that chap. You know I don't want anything. You weren't to blame that a kid got right in front of your car and was bumped."

"I'm afraid the courts wouldn't be as generous as you are, Billy. Juries and automobilists can't agree. But we'll talk about damages another day."

"I'll never speak to you again if you ever mention them," said Billy. "Now fire away with your news. The princess and I have told ours."

“All right,” said Mr. Harkness, “if you are sure you can stand some bad with the good.”

“I’m fit for anything,” replied Billy.

“You remember the day you came to my office about the lease?” Billy nodded.

“You told me about your mother’s being at the sanitarium in Wareham. Well I couldn’t help believing you, but as a matter of business I’ve learned to distrust everything that can’t be proved. So in spite of my belief I went to the telephone and confirmed it. I called up the sanitarium and spoke to Dr. Gillett, who happens to be an old friend. And, now, this is the bad news, Billy. He said your mother had been brought there, but that the case had been hopeless from the start. She had no strength. Two weeks after she came, there was a hemorrhage and she died, unconscious. He said it was a very sad case as your mother seemed so alone. She told one of the nurses about you. She seemed to be very fond of you. She thought she had

neglected you and gave the nurse the address of your father's sister in England. As it happened I was going across in a few days and I made up my mind to look up your aunt. I thought, perhaps, she could help you and I intended to put your case to her strong. But all sorts of things prevented my doing this. There was business to attend to and friends of my own to look up, and my time was so taken that I never got around to your affairs until just before I sailed for home. Then I looked up your aunt's address; found she lived in London only a few months in the year; followed up what clues I could find, and finally went up country where she has a small estate; found she had gone to London for a few days, went back to town and finally located her the day before I sailed. I called at the address where she was stopping but she was out. However, her aunt—your great-aunt, Billy—was there, and a more mellow and delightful old lady, I never met. She wanted to know all about

you and I glossed things over as best I could. I said you'd had a pretty hard row to hoe since your mother died, but that you would come out all right. She seemed particularly distressed that you were not in school and said they would come for you, or send for you, immediately, and would I look out for you in the meantime. They were very, very fond of your father, although they lost track of him after he came to America and after his marriage had only the most meagre news. In fact they had never heard of your existence."

"I wasn't more'n a month old when he died, Mr. Harkness, and mother was sick for several months, so she didn't write. There was a little insurance money, but we used that up and then mother went to the Star. We were getting along all right, and I went to school until mother went to the sanitarium and I didn't want to go to Uncle Nathan's."

"It's all right now, Billy. Your mother

seemed no more anxious for you to go to your Uncle Nathan, permanently, than you were to go. I didn't meet your aunt, but if she is anything like the great-aunt, you're all right. I wrote and told them about the accident as soon as I heard that it was you I had rammed, and they've asked me to keep them informed about your condition. Your aunt, Miss Genevieve Harkness, is very anxious to come to America and take you back with her, but Madame Buttrick, your great-aunt, is laid up with sciatica and she feels that she can't leave the dear old lady. So you're to stay with us until you're well enough to travel and then off we'll ship you to Bonnie England."

"Not for good," remonstrated Billy. "I don't want to go to England for good. I'd rather work and live in America. England's such a dinky little place."

Just then there was a stifled sound from the princess. Both Mr. Harkness and Billy

had forgotten her for the moment. Now they looked at her, alarmed.

"What's the matter," said Mr. Harkness, leaning over her.

"Oh nothing," replied the princess, swallowing. "I don't want to sit up any more. I don't feel well. Please, please take me in, *quick*."

Mr. Harkness beckoned a nurse and the princess was wheeled away. At the door she turned and looked bravely back, waving a thin hand. But when the nurse had undressed her and tucked her into bed again, the princess turned her back to the big room with its rows of little white cots and pretended asleep. But in spite of herself, the tears trickled from the tightly closed eyelids and wet the pillow so that the nurse had to slip a dry one under her head, when at last she really did go to sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

YOUNG MR. HARKNESS GETS HIS WAY



FROM what you say I judge that you intend to turn the place into a sort of convalescent's home, Jim," growled the elderly Mr. Harkness, stir-

ring his coffee.

"Not at all, dad, but here we are with forty acres in which to keep out of each other's way, to say nothing of half a mile of sandy beach," replied the younger Mr. Harkness. "I'll see that they don't get under your feet, dad."

"Umph," said the elder Mr. Harkness. "I shouldn't mind the boy; he seems to be a youngster of good parts and descent, but from what you say I judge the girl is a little vixen of the worst kind."

“I wish you could see her, dad. She hasn't any more spunk than a wet rag, now, whatever she may have been before this attack of pneumonia. Besides, it isn't on her account but on the boy's that I thought of bringing her. He feels responsible for her, you see.”

Mrs. Harkness smiled upon her handsome son. “You could persuade a stone wall, James,” she said, “but I'm afraid my objection will be harder to overcome than your father's. I rather dread the influence of this little street arab on the two children. Dorothy is especially impressionable. As you know, I am perfectly willing to take the boy for a few weeks, but I don't understand why you aren't willing to have the other child — the princess, as you call her — boarded with some nice family where there are no children with standards of good behaviour to be upset.”

“Now, mumsey,” said the young man, getting up and going around the table to kiss the top of his mother's head, “it isn't

a bit like you to go back on me. I feel that I owe Billy a good deal. Why he could have let me in for ten thousand and he threatened to pummel the lawyer who offered to take his case. I feel that I owe the boy a good deal and for a good many reasons. In the first place I neglected his affairs shamefully, when I was on the other side. I had an idea that his relatives were no doubt as poverty stricken as he and that they would feel very little interest in the American offshoot of the family. Then, when I got back I waited a week before looking the boy up and so let him in for the grind-up under my wheels. There's mighty little that I'm going to be able to do for him anyway, for his aunts seem more than able to provide him with worldly goods."

"But none of us are objecting to *his* coming, James," replied Mrs. Harkness, patting the brown hand on her shoulder. "It's that little girl. We want to make the boy as happy as we can, but I dread

the influence of that little girl on Dick and Dorothy."

"All right, mother, if you say 'no' I suppose it's no go, but I'm pretty certain that Billy won't come down here and leave the princess. She seems to be the first creature on earth that the boy ever had a chance to care for, and his devotion is wonderful. But if you say 'no' I suppose I can board them both somewhere until Billy's aunt arrives. I dread to think what will happen when she tries to take Billy away from his little ward."

"Now, James, don't talk foolishly of boarding Billy somewhere. We want him here. In fact I'm half tempted to run down to the city and see both the children," said Mrs. Harkness.

"I wish you would," said her son. "You'd find a handsome, well behaved little man, and a most harmless little girl. Harmless, at least, as far as I can see."

"Perhaps her illness has driven out the devils," remarked the elder Mr. Harkness,

dryly. "We may as well capitulate at once, mother," he went on, addressing his wife. "I see James has made up his mind."

"You're a brick, dad," remarked James, holding out his hand. "You're going to make two little people very happy. And do you consent mother?" the young man continued, smiling into a pair of blue eyes very much like his own.

"There's nothing else for me to do, with the majority on the other side."

"All right, then. I'll bring them down to-night. They're neither of them in first-class shape yet, but they'll pick up like everything in this fine air."

"I suppose we can turn the nursery into a convalescents' retreat. Dick and Dorothy seem to have outgrown it. Is the princess too old for dolls?"

"I don't believe she knows. I doubt if she ever had a doll in her life."

"Well, Dorothy has seventeen. They

will amuse her when the weather keeps her inside."

"Mother, you're a trump," exclaimed the young man. "I'm going to take the very first train down and we'll be back on the five o'clock."

"Isn't there somebody's permission to be asked before you bring this child? What is her name, James? This calling her 'princess' is the most arrant nonsense."

"Her name's Hortense. Yes, there's a stepmother. I've seen her already. A respectable little French bonne who does fine needlework. Hortense made my life a burden and I fancy she's glad to be rid of her. She saw the child day before yesterday and I could see that the relations were a trifle strained."

"I fancy it's the child's fault," remarked Mrs. Harkness. "I've an idea she is very difficult."

"I sha'n't try to change that idea, mother. I haven't had a chance to judge as the fever has taken the tuck out, but she

seems to be picking up fast. I heard her ordering Billy about a little, yesterday.”

Mrs. Harkness sighed. “I think I’ll have to look up the little stepmother when I go to town. She has my sympathy.”

“Mine too,” agreed her son. “But I must be going. Expect me at five with the children in tow. Good-bye, mumsey; good-bye, dad.”

Mr. and Mrs. Harkness smiled across the table at each other.

“Will the boy ever outgrow his impulses, papa?” asked Mrs. Harkness.

“I hope not,” answered her husband. “They’re usually pretty good ones: but here come the children. I think they suspect there’s something in the wind. There usually is something, you know, when they’re sent out to play before we’ve finished coffee.”

His words were barely finished when there was the patter of feet on the veranda and the children rushed into the breakfast-room through the long French window.

“ Oh mother, we’ve found such a splendid cave. We think there’s a buried treasure. Don’t you want to come and see? We’re going to begin digging right away.”

Mrs. Harkness smiled. “ If you can wait a few minutes, Dick. I want to see that the nursery is put in order. We are to have two little invalids here to-night.”

“ Oh, mother,” screamed Dorothy. “ Is it the boy that Jim ran over and the funny little girl? ”

“ She isn’t a funny little girl, dear. She’s just like you or any other child. She’s to be your playmate for a few days and you must not get her into mischief.”

“ I’ll try not to, mother,” replied Dorothy, seriously.

Dick grinned. He was familiar with his mother’s methods. When he was particularly longing for adventure his mother usually asked Dorothy not to get him into mischief. The little girl that was coming must be very naughty, he concluded.

“What is the little girl’s name?” demanded Dorothy.

“Her name is Hortense, dear. Hortense St. Cyr. She was born in France.”

“The boy’s name is Billy, isn’t it?”

“Yes Dick, and you must be careful in your games. I’m afraid the broken bones are not firmly knit, as yet.”

“All right mother. I’ll handle him with kid gloves. I don’t suppose he’ll be much sport for a while if he can’t knock around any. Do you think he cares about fishing?”

“I guess he will care for it,” said Mr. Harkness. “He hasn’t had a chance to find out much about his tastes, I take it. I’m going down to walk on the beach and if your cave is in that direction I’d like to see it.”

The three crossed the piazza, the children dashing ahead, their father with his erect figure and bare brown head, which showed but a trace of gray, following them leisurely, stopping here and there to pull the

bright coloured mushrooms that dotted the lawn. Mrs. Harkness watched them for a moment, then ran lightly up the stairs, to look over the nursery and the airy rooms that were to be assigned to the coming guests.



CHAPTER XX

AUNT GENEVIEVE ARRIVES



THREE weeks later, Billy found the princess standing in the door that opened towards the old-fashioned flower garden. She had started when she first heard his step and hidden something behind her. Seeing Billy, she called softly.

“ Billy, see what I found on the mantel.” She held a pair of small opera glasses in her hand. “ You twist this little wheel and then look and everything seems a great deal bigger and nearer. When I look at the little bird house down there in the garden it seems near by.”

Billy looked through the glasses and then examined them thoughtfully.

“ Oh, I see,” he said at last. “ These

have little curved glasses in them. They must magnify the things."

"Oh," said the princess. "These must be a different kind."

Billy nodded absently and stood looking into the garden, lost in thought. At last he said, crossly: "My Aunt Genevieve is coming to-night. They've had a cable-gram."

The princess looked through the glasses but did not reply.

"Did you hear me?" shouted Billy. "My Aunt Genevieve is coming. I'm going to England."

"Is that all?" replied the princess, the glasses against her eyes.

"I'm glad I'm going," said Billy.

"So am I," said the princess, without dropping the glasses.

"I'm going to stay there for ever."

"I shouldn't think you'd like to stay in such a little red country as you showed me on the map. I'm glad I can stay in America."

“So am I,” replied Billy. “You’re so disagreeable.”

Matters were getting serious when young Mr. Harkness jumped over the piazza rail waving an envelope.

“Your aunt will be here on the five o’clock. George has driven down to meet her.”

The princess turned her back on Mr. Harkness with a flounce.

“Will she take me away to-night?” asked Billy. “I’d rather stay until after the ball game, Saturday.”

“Oh, she’s just going to get acquainted first. Then she’s going to take you on a trip west.”

“Is he going to ride in a sleeping-car?” demanded the princess, staring through the glasses at a Japanese vase.

“I suppose so,” replied Mr. Harkness, smiling.

“It must be stuffy,” said the princess.

“It is,” replied Mr. Harkness.

“I’d hate having to go off with just an

old aunt and never seeing any of my friends any more," said the princess. "I think maybe I'll go away to-morrow, myself."

"Where do you think of going, Hortense?" asked Mr. Harkness, very much amused.

"I think I'll go back to France. There are flowers everywhere and the most beautiful houses. You've never seen such beautiful houses as there are in France. Billy. And you couldn't build one if you tried a hundred, million years."

"I don't want to build any old French houses. I like the kind they have here in America and in England," said Billy, knocking his heel against the railing of the porch.

"Nobody in England knows when to laugh. Dick says they haven't any sense about funny things, so there. I wouldn't live in a country where people are always cross."

"You're awfully ignorant. England is

the greatest and most powerful country — ”

“ It isn’t; it isn’t,” cried the princess. “ I wish you’d hurry up and go off with your old aunt and stay away for ever and ever.” The princess was tearing down the hall. She burst through the door at the opposite end — the door that opened upon the drive and bumped into a pretty young lady in a rough-looking gray dress and a very small black hat.

“ Oh,” said the princess, winking her eyes very fast. “ Excuse me.”

“ Why the child is crying,” said the young lady, holding the princess by the shoulder.

“ I’m not,” said the princess.

Just then Mr. Harkness appeared and the young lady let the princess go to hold out her hand to him. It came out in a few minutes that this was Billy’s Aunt Genevieve and that she was thirty years old although she looked so pink and white and so very young.

She shook hands with Billy and said he was a Lewis from head to foot. She talked in a cheery, pleasant voice that was quite captivating. She told Billy all about the old Lewis homestead in Yorkshire where they still kept a toy house that Billy's father built when he was even younger than Billy. She made the most interesting plans for Billy's future. It was all mapped out, she told Mrs. Harkness. He was to go to the little school where his father had prepared for college and afterwards to college. He was to have his father's room, facing the south, and a horse to ride. To all of which, Billy listened quietly.

"And now, Mrs. Harkness," concluded the pretty aunt, "Billy has intruded long enough upon your hospitality. I want to take him away in the morning to get him ready to make a western tour with me. I want to see this wonderful America; not the America of the big cities which is so much like England of the big cities, but of the country and the little towns. I think

one gets so much nearer the heart of a country in its village life, don't you Mr. Harkness? "

Mr. Harkness agreed with Aunt Genevieve and straightway they began to discuss the differences between the country life of many nations. Neither noticed that Billy tiptoed to the door and slipped into the old-fashioned garden. Making his way through the tangle of rose bushes, he stumbled into the summer house at the end and almost fell over some dark object that was stretched across the threshold.

" Princess! " cried Billy.

" Go away," said a stifled little voice. " You're a horrid, disagreeable boy." Then sitting up and drawing her hair down over her eyes, the princess demanded, suddenly, " When are you going away? "

" My aunt says to-morrow."

" You're a horrid, disagreeable boy and I'm glad you're going, even if you did promise you'd take care of me, always.

You told a story. Dorothy says it's wicked to tell stories."

"You said you wanted me to go away," replied Billy, on the defensive.

"I don't. I was making believe. I don't want you to go away, ever. I want the little house and the gold field."

"I've been thinking of that. But they're building the factory now so I suppose we couldn't go back, anyway, but maybe I could get a lease somewhere else."

"Do you think you could, Billy? And build another house with a li-ber-ary, and a piazza, and a flower garden?"

"Maybe, after I study to be an architect."

"Then you're going! Saying you'd take care of me always was just a great, big, wicked story."

"But what good would it do for me to stay? Mrs. Harkness is going to send you off to school just as soon as she can have a talk with your stepmother. To a board-

ing-school, princess, where you can learn to read and play the piano."

"I don't want to go to school; you can teach me to read just like everything."

"But you have to learn other things in school besides reading. She says she is going to have you learn to sing. Dick told me. Then, when I come back from England, I'll build the house and we'll have a piano and you can sing and play. Mr. Harkness said I must keep a brave front and he thinks I ought to come back and be an American citizen after I get through going to school. Princess, I'm trying to be brave, but it's harder than it used to be before I broke my ribs. I think I must have hurt the inside of my stomach, I feel so queer when I'm trying to be brave."

"So do I," said the princess, shaking back her hair. "But if you'll promise to truly come back, I'll try to be good. I promised Mrs. Harkness, but I feel just like crying and kicking, Billy. And you

ought to stay with me because I had you a long time before any of them did."

"But I am coming back after you, princess."

"Honestly and truly? Will you criss-cross your heart the way Dick does?"

"Criss-cross my heart, princess. I'll come back and build the house. I wouldn't go at all if Mr. Harkness hadn't explained that it was necessary."

"All right," said the princess, trying to smile. "I'll be good, too, if you'll surely come back. I'll learn a lot of songs."

"It's only six or seven years, anyway," said Billy.

"That isn't very long. Why, it isn't as long as I am old," replied the princess bravely.

"That's so," said Billy, following the princess up the gravel walk and around the tangle of roses to the steps where Mrs. Harkness and Aunt Genevieve were waiting.

When Aunt Genevieve saw the princess,

she smiled. The smile reminded Billy of the long ago and of Miss Mabie when she looked at him in a way that gave him a queer feeling in his chest and said "my little man." The princess must have seen the lock, too, for suddenly when Aunt Genevieve held out her arms, the princess with a happy little cry sprang into them and hid her face in Aunt Genevieve's shoulder. Billy could not look at them for a moment or two. That old squirmy feeling was making everything misty. When he could see again he noticed that Aunt Genevieve's cheeks were dripping wet. Her voice sounded choky as she held the princess close against her and said:

"Mrs. Harkness has told me all about you, dear little princess, and I'm going to bring him back to see you in the spring when school is out."

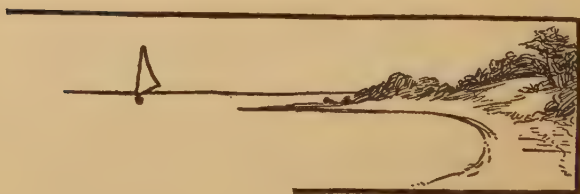
"Oh," said the princess in a muffled voice. "Then it won't be all those long seven years, after all, and you'll let him go

and play at being rich in the little house in the empty lot."

"Yes, dear, if you'll let me play with you sometimes."

"Indeed we will," said the princess, throwing back her head and shaking the curls from her wet eyes, "and I'll show you all the little cupboards that Billy made, and the pictures of the most beautiful little house with a li-ber-ary and flower garden."

THE END.



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